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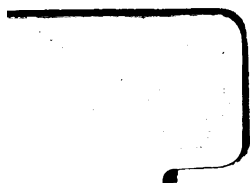
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# BAD LUCK.

A Novel.

BY

ALBANY DE FONBLANQUE,

AUTHOR OF "A TANGLED SKEIN," "CUT ADRIPT,"  
ETC., ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.



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# BAD LUCK.



## CHAPTER I.

### HIDING.

“ WOULD you mind my having a few moments' conversation with my daughter?" said Mr. Marston as soon as he had recovered from his surprise. "We will take a turn by the embankment, and join you directly."

"You have annoyed me beyond expression, Bell," he said in a less jaunty tone as they passed down the dark and silent

street. "How could you do such a thing?"

"I wanted to see Madge, papa ; and we went everywhere looking for you to come too. You have seen her. Oh, papa, what does it all mean ? Is she well ; is she happy ? You will take me to her, won't you ?"

"She is as well and as happy as she can be under the circumstances. Let that suffice."

"No papa, I cannot. I want to see her ; my husband says I may go. He is here to take me if we could only find the place. I don't want to annoy you, but I tell you candidly, I intend to see my sister, and if you won't show us where she lives, we will find out for ourselves."

"Oh dear, oh dear ! Do you want to ruin us all ?" whines her father.

“I don’t see what possible good it can do her to make such a mystery,” Bell urges. “We know she has made an imprudent marriage; that she is living in some wretched slum; that she must be poor. You admit she is not altogether well or happy. Surely we must do something for her? And, papa; you must excuse my saying that you do not treat me fairly. You said to-day that you gave her up—would have nothing more to do with her—poor child! and you went home (as you said) to compose yourself. You did not go home. You went straight to Madge, and we find you here coming—you cannot deny it—from her house. There is a mystery about it that I don’t like, and I *will* fathom.”

“I forbid you to interfere,” he replies, getting angry; “you are undutiful and

cruel. You pretend to love your sister, and would sacrifice her !”

“Go to Madge, papa (I will wait for you), bring me one line from her, saying that she does not want to see me, and I will be satisfied.”

“Will you be content to see her for a minute or two, and abide by what she says ?”

“Oh yes.”

“And you will persuade De Gray not to press the matter further ?”

“I will do whatever Madge wishes.”

“Very well, but if misery comes of this don’t blame me ; I never had any control over you. You force me to take the lesser of two evils. I suppose you must have your own way, as usual. On your head be the consequences.”

By this time they have reached the em-

bankment. They turn the corner and enter the third of the stucco-fronted leaky residences before mentioned. The door stands open ; the hall is made dim by one penitential beck of gas ; on the floor are three boxes, corded as though for a journey.

“ Let me go up first and prepare her,” whispers Mr. Marston. “ She is not strong, and the surprise might harm her.”

He springs up the narrow stairs three steps at a time, leaving Bell to count the moments marked by the beating of her heart in the dim hall. Why did it take so long to “ prepare ” Madge ? Why was her father acting so inconsistently ? Could it be that this was only a trick to—— Oh no. A pale worn face appears on the landing, and this fear is negatived without words. The sisters are in each

other's arms, with a cry that comes from their hearts.

"Oh Bell! dear, dear Bell!"

"My poor Madge!"

"No, don't look at me," sobs the younger, sliding to her knees, and hiding her face in the other's dress; "don't look at me till you say you forgive me. I know you love me still, or you would not be here. Oh Bell, say you forgive me, or I shall die."

"Get up, darling—*please*. Don't sob so, little Madge. I do forgive you with all my heart; I know there must be some reason for what you have done, my poor child! You would not like me to say that you have not made me suffer bitterly. That would be as much as to tell you I did not love you; but it is all over now."

"You wear this for me?" asked Madge,

lifting a tear-stained face from the black crape skirt.

"I had not time to change it, dearie. The black is only in my dress now—that's nothing."

"If I had only died that night as you all supposed, before——"

"I will not allow you to kneel, Madge ; get up this instant and kiss your sister. Papa says I must not stay, and that it will depend upon you if we are to meet again. Don't let us waste precious moments. My husband and Uncle Joe are waiting for me."

"They won't come here?" cries Madge, starting up in a fright.

"Not unless you wish. Now come in—is this your room?—and make the most of our time. My darling, you are looking wretchedly ill."



"I am getting better, indeed I am."

"Madge, are you happy?"

"As happy as I can be," she sighs.

"And he—your husband?"—Bell got the word out with a gulp—"is he kind to you?"

"Oh, so kind! so good! If I really ever had a doubt that I loved him, it is long since at an end."

"I am glad of that. Another home question. Are you—don't fly out at me, Madge; I know what it is to be poor—are you—do you want for anything?"

"Oh no! We have enough to live on for a long, long time. Why do you ask?"

"You sold the clasp of your pearl necklet."

"Hush! He don't know that. It was

---

of no use to me, and I hated asking him for money."

"I can understand that ; but what about the future ? You must not live like this. It is downright cruelty to ask you. What does your husband intend to do ?"

"Bell dear, dear sister, don't ask ; I must not tell you ; we have got to leave this house to-night, and go—oh, I know not where—abroad, I think, and I shall never see you again."

"And this you call his being kind and good to you !"

"Bell, you are a wife, and you know, much as I love you all, I have one duty—no, duty is not the word—one life in my life, and that is his."

Bell drew her flushed face to her breast and kissed it.

"You are so good," Madge whispers,

creeping closer to her. "If I could only tell you, but papa—"

"Does he know?" asks Bell quickly.

"Why, of course!"

"You told him to-day?"

"To-day!"

"You don't mean to tell me," Bell cries, starting back as a sudden thought struck her, "that he has known all along you were not dead?"

"He acted for the best, dear."

"I never heard of anything so monstrous!" exclaims her sister, aghast. "Then it was really you who passed through the garden that night?"

"Look here, Bell, I was under age. We could not have been married without his consent."

"And you went to him in his study and got it!"

“It was the only way. He had told me—Bell, you must not ask me any more questions, or I shall be saying something that will ruin us.”

“Do you know that papa has taunted me a dozen times with allowing you to go out that night, as though I were answerable for your supposed death? that he has abused poor Fraser as though he were your murderer?”

“Ah, Bell! you said you forgave me.”

“I am speaking of papa.”

“He did it all for me.”

“You have put my brain in such a whirl, that I do not know what to think or what to say. Am I to believe anybody?”

“Believe me, dear Bell, when I assure you that no unnecessary pain has been inflicted, no confidence which it was pos-

sible to make, withheld. See—what has happened? Uncle Joe, with the best motives, I am sure, has had us watched and followed. Others might do the same. This is why we have to move.”

“But why?—why?” cries Bell. “What is all this fuss for? Surely running away, even if you had not your father’s consent, isn’t a crime?”

Madge turns deadly pale.

“I may not answer you,” she falters.

“You do not trust me,” says Bell, flushing up.

“The secret is not mine, dear. If my husband were here——”

“Which I am most thankful he is not,” Bell says, bridling up.

“I will not hear you speak of him in that tone. He does not deserve it,” retorts Madge, drawing back.

“Then I think we had better leave him out of our talk, dear, for I cannot promise to assume any other. You cannot expect me to speak kindly of a man who has brought such misery upon one I was—no, I’ll say I *am* so fond of.”

“I assure you, Bell,” says Madge, in a low voice with a semi-tone of pain in it, “that you need not grieve for me.”

“I was not thinking of you. You say he makes you happy; but there is one whose life he has blighted. I don’t want to give you any unnecessary pain, my poor child, or to mention names which I suppose you ought to forget. However, I must mention this. Did papa tell you that a letter came for you the day after you—you left?”

“From Fraser?”

“Yes; I opened it, to find out where to

telegraph, and, Madge, I could not help reading it."

"No matter now," says the other wearily. "I hope you burned it."

"I had no right. Papa wanted to, but as I was responsible for opening it, I would not let him. I have it here" (producing the letter as she speaks, and walking towards the fireplace), "and if you say so——"

"No; please give it to me," says Madge, holding out her hand.

"Take care, Madge, it might make mischief."

"So it might," she replies with a start; but she has already taken it. A sad smile flickers over her face as she reads the address—*Miss Marston*. "To a dead woman," she muses aloud.

"Dead still to him who wrote it," Bell

adds, rather bitterly. But Madge does not hear, or hearing, heed.

To her sister's intense surprise, she raises the letter to her lips, kisses it, and then drops it, folded, into the midst of the burning coals.

"Poor fellow! God help him!" whimpers tender-hearted Bell. It seems to her somehow that the paper, now a ragged black ash, is a sensitive thing—a part of Fraser Ellicott—and that its destruction hurts him.

Madge, who is watching the sparks dodge each other and die out, echoes her "God help him!" "That is good; you are getting back to the old Bell," she continues, leading her to the sofa. "Let that be the last of the past. Oh, Bell! if we could only burn up some days of our lives, as we can burn up those pieces of



paper! But it's no use repining. What is done is done, so let us be as happy as we can be."

"I had better go," Bell answers, rising. "Horace will think I am lost; and it seems I can do no good here. I suppose, as papa has your confidence, he will know where you go, and that we may correspond sometimes? By-the-bye, where is papa?"

"Watching outside, I think."

"Mystery upon mystery!"

"The man who found us for Uncle Joe told him, so papa says, that some one else was looking for us," says Madge in a frightened whisper.

"Terrible! Are you so afraid of the world? I have no patience with such folly! Sooner or later it must come out that Miss Marston did not fall over the cliff, but eloped—not knowing her own

mind; and when the nine days' wonder has died out and people have had their talk, who cares? Be brave, Madge, and get it out directly. Do not be guided by papa. He was always for procrastination and concealment. Bell the cat at once. I don't admire your husband, or his conduct; but for your sake I will receive him kindly. Come to my house, both of you, and leave the rest to me."

Madge covers her face with her hands, and sobs as though her heart would break.

"If your husband wishes you to lead this hole-and-corner life," Bell continues, "it is a bad sign. God forbid that I should say a word to lessen your affection for him, but no man has a right to make a martyr of his wife like this—shutting her out from family and friends! I suppose it is pride.

Well, do as I propose for a month, just to save appearances ; and then go and live as quietly as you like, and we will help you all we can. I suppose he has talent ?”

“ I don’t understand you.”

“ I suppose he is clever.”

“ Clever, Bell ?”

“ I can hardly speak plainer. You look as dazed as though I were speaking in the unknown tongue.”

“ Oh yes ! I see now,” cries Madge, recovering herself with a start. “ I was thinking of something else. Never fear, darling ! we shall not starve.”

“ Of course he has given up the idea of going to Barbadoes ?”

“ Quite,” replies Madge, with a shudder.

“ There, now, you are lapsing again into the semi-idiotic stare, Madge ; and have not answered my proposal.”

"Dear sister, it is most kind, but—  
There is some one coming upstairs! If it  
should be my husband?"

"I would rather not meet him to-night,  
Madge. I—I am not prepared," cries  
Bell. "I'm afraid I should not be as civil  
as I—as I want to be. Can't I go out  
some other way?"

"Yes; come into the back room. I'll  
manage it."

"You are not hurt, Madge?" asks her  
sister, hesitating at the door. "If you  
want *very* much, I'll try——"

"No, no! I would rather you did not  
meet just now. Come this way, quick!  
and help me draw the doors."

But there is no occasion for concealment.  
The stepper on the stairs is Mr. Marston,  
who, after a hurried whisper with Madge, in-  
sists upon Bell's departure. She was agita-

ting her sister; she was exhausting her husband's patience; she was keeping up the people of the house. He all but hustles her out into the street; but not before she has made Madge promise to write, wherever she went, and to see her again if possible.

They had not walked far, when Bell noticed that they were not returning by the way they had come.

"Where are you taking me?" she asked. "Surely we are going away from where we left Horace and the cab!"

"Oh, he's home by this time!" said Marston, hailing a hansom that "crawled" in the great glittering thoroughfare they had just reached. "I told him you and Madge would have a great deal to say to each other, and you would probably be late."

"Oh, papa! and you hurried me away because you said they were waiting! How can I believe or trust you when you go on like this?"

"Well, well, well! don't let us discuss it in the street," he replied impatiently. "Get in and let us drive home. I am thoroughly wearied out with all this questioning."

"And I with all this concealment," she whispered, as she stepped into the cab. "You are misleading Madge," she continued, when they were fairly under weigh and had turned into a quieter street. "You have only one way of contending with misfortunes, papa, and that is by shirking them and hiding, and I *do* think it is so foolish."

"Good heavens! Bell, you speak as if it were all *my* fault. What have I done?"

"You conceal things, and—papa, I must say it—you don't tell the truth."

"Pshaw, how you quibble! I gave other reasons for taking you away."

"Did you give the true one?" asked Bell.

"Oh dear! oh dear! Do please understand that I am not master in this wretched business. You have no consideration, Bell. You think of nothing but the gratification of your curiosity. It is too bad! Suppose you and Horace had some secret which you didn't want Madge to know—what would you think of me if I were to go and tell her?"

"I think I understand," said Bell dryly, "Mr. Wybert did not want to see me, and so I was hustled out. Is that so?"

"It was not convenient, my dear, that you should meet, but——"

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“ Oh, never mind excuses, papa; you were on the watch—Madge told me so. Now I know what for. I can easily realise the *inconvenience* to him of our meeting; and you can assure Mr. Wybert from me, that not even the pleasure of seeing his wife will take me under his roof again.”


Having delivered herself thus, with some warmth and a fizz of spite in it, Bell threw herself back in her corner, and the rest of the journey was passed in silence.





## CHAPTER II.

### NEWS AT LAST.

“T last!” exclaimed Mr. Pryor, holding an unopened letter out at arm’s length over his official desk, and turning it about, now seal, now direction uppermost. “At last! You’ve taken your time about it, young gentleman, I must say.”

The young gentleman thus apostrophised was Fraser Ellicott, and the letter which the agent had pounced upon out of the

heap before him the moment he took his seat that morning, was in his handwriting. Now we know that Pryor was vexed with his client for keeping silent so long, and we have heard what was to happen if he did not speedily mend his ways and communicate. Here was his letter—at last ! but somehow Pryor did not hasten to open it. He looked at the stamps (which were Spanish) and said “ At last ! ” again. He turned it over and looked at the seal which was impressed with Fraser’s crest, and said “ At last ! ” for the third time. Then he looked at the foreign post-mark, which ran, “ Madrid, Feb. 28th,” and repeated his exclamation once more. What was Ellicott doing at Madrid ? Mr. Pryor opened his penknife with much deliberation, cut the envelope, and read as follows :

“ Madrid, Feb. 28th.

“ DEAR PRYOR,

“ I rather expected to find a letter from you here, but on the principle that no news is good news, am not disappointed. Things go right somewhere, I suppose. I have not the least idea how long I shall remain in this city, or where I shall go when I leave it. All places are alike to me now, but—*il faut vivre*, which in my case means buy railway tickets and pay hotel bills. So please send me some money in bank of England notes. They are easily changed, and avoid the bother of having oneself identified. Send me six fifties under cover to the Rev. F. Marston, 139, Victoria Street, he will know where to address me for the present.

“ Notwithstanding my earnest desire to be left untroubled, under my misfortunes,

---

I find that several persons are making impertinent inquiries about me ; so please consider my former request ratified, and do not mention where I am. Any one who really cares for me may know that my body is well, and that the rest of me will be all the better for being left alone.

“Yours sincerely,

“FRASER ELLICOTT.”

When Pryor came to the words “former request” he turned back to the commencement of this letter, which he had skimmed, and mused, “So he has written something which has not reached me ; how’s that ?”

Like a true Briton he concluded it was “those confounded foreign posts,” and turned to the rest of his correspondence.

No use. Instructions respecting "Tucker's mortgage" got mixed up with six fifties; and the question put by Farmer Bateson of Greggs, if he could not have the law "off" Grimes the butcher for calling him "an old duffer" on market-day, remained unconsidered.

He read Fraser's letter over and over again, and saw between the lines how utterly miserable he must be. And he had known him all his life, and often envied him! Then that strange request made by Kate Vane came suddenly to his recollection. What did she want his address for? Was she one of those who had been making impertinent inquiries? If so, for what purpose? The dull old town had amused itself with several scandals arising out of Kate Vane's conduct at the old Hall and at the mill, all of which had

been traced to Mrs. Wybert, and had had the foundation cut from under them by the discovery that it was not Kate who was talked about at Oxford, but her elder sister.

Kate had been there only for a few days, and had returned vexed and angry with Mr. Ellicott for having (as she thought) cut her in Christ Church meadows. Why should this girl, who professed such a dislike for the Squire—who had so indignantly repelled his kindness—want to know his address?

Pryor had no answer for himself upon any of these points, but for the life of him he could not keep Kate Vane out of his musings over the misfortunes of Fraser Ellicott.

He pulled himself together at last, wrote a long account of what had been done in

consequence of the flood ; tore it up, and wrote a short one, in which he urged work at home as the best medicine for the wanderer, told him his first letter had miscarried, and promised to do as he wished. Then he went to the bank, got six crisp new bank-notes of fifty pounds each, and inclosed all under cover to the Rev. F. Marston, as directed.

You will understand that at this time Queen Anne was not more thoroughly dead for Pryor than that reverend gentleman's younger daughter.

People had got tired of asking about Fraser. Whilst they did ask, Pryor's invariable reply was, "Travelling." He wasn't going to suggest a mystery, out of which some new scandal might be woven. He was not one of those clumsy ones who have to tell lies when they want to conceal

the truth. His manner led inquirers to imagine he was in constant correspondence with his client.

*Travelling!* Why, we are all travelling. And when some added "on the Continent," and others were told he was in Paris enjoying himself, and seemed to have quite got over his affliction, Pryor held his peace.

People had got tired of asking questions now ; so that the attorney was somewhat surprised, when he returned to his office from the bank, to find a gentlemanly-looking man, and a stranger, waiting for him, with the request that he would be so good as to give him (the stranger) Mr. Ellicott's present address.

"I really cannot," Pryor replied with truth—for had not Fraser himself written that he did not know how soon he should



leave Madrid, or whither he should go when he moved? "I suppose you know I am his agent, or you would not be here? Can I do anything for you?"

"No," said the stranger carelessly. "I thank you very much; but it is only a personal matter. May I ask where he was when you last heard from him?"

"Hum—m!" mused Pryor to himself; "this is one of those fellows who are bothering him. A personal matter, eh?" he said aloud. "If you are acquainted personally with my client, you are aware, Mr.—Mr.——"

"Edwards. Allow me to give you my card."

"Thank you. Well, then, you must be aware, Mr. Edwards, that he has lately suffered perhaps the most painful be-

reavement that a young man can undergo."

"I am. The lady to whom he was engaged is supposed to have fallen from the cliff at Laremouth.

"Why do you say 'supposed'?" Pryor demanded, with a frown.

"Excuse me," Mr. Edwards rejoined; "I understand the drift of your objection to the word. There was a foolish report about suicide, which was far from being in my mind. I said 'supposed' because no one actually saw her fall."

"Are you a lawyer?"

"Oh dear no! What made you think that?" Mr. Edwards smiled at the idea.

"Because you are so particular about your words. Well, Mr. Ellicott has gone abroad, and is travelling for the express

purpose of getting away from all that can remind him of his loss, and of trying to deaden it by change and so forth. Do you follow me?"

"I do."

"Then I think you will understand why I cannot help you to communicate with him. If he wanted his letters to be forwarded, he would give me (or some one) instructions to do so."

"Whereas," said the gentlemanly stranger, with his gentlemanly smile, as he rose to depart, "he begs you to do nothing of the kind; and you have not been able to persuade him into a wiser course. Perhaps he does not even know how he is damaging his own character, and—well, I have gone too far to go back—and that of the young lady."

"You must go on further before I

can understand you," said Pryor, getting uneasy.

"Don't you know the origin of that story about suicide, Mr. Pryor?"

"Envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness—the origin of all scandals," says the lawyer.

"No, Mr. Pryor—selfishness! He had not the moral courage to face his grief; he did not even go to Laremouth and assist in the search for the poor girl's body. No one jumped at the conclusion that she was dead quicker than he did. He behaved as though he wanted to believe it. He ran away the moment he heard the news, and has never communicated with those whose grief he ought to have shared."

The gentlemanly stranger spoke with much deliberation, and Pryor turned red

and white, hot and cold, as these home-thrusts were delivered. The ending helped him.

"Tush!" he exclaimed, "you know nothing about him. He is in correspondence with Mr. Marston."

"Indeed!" observed the gentlemanly stranger, "I was not aware of that."

There was something in the tone which Mr. Pryor did not quite like. He felt as though he had been *drawn*.

"If you are his friend, Mr. Edwards," he said, taking some papers towards him, as a hint that the interview was over, "you'll do as he wishes, and leave him alone. If you're not, I think you had better——"

"Mind my own business," interrupted Mr. Edwards, with his gentlemanly smile. "I will; depend upon it, Mr. Pryor, that

I quite appreciate your advice and shall act upon it. I really must apologise for having taken up so much of your valuable time."

"Don't mention it. Good-day."

"Good-day, sir," and this gentlemanly man, with a polite bow and high-bred sweep of his hat, left the room.

But not the town. That evening as Pryor walked home, he saw him on the bridge in earnest conversation with Kate Vane. What did that mean? Pryor walked on, and stopped at the end of the lane which led to his house, to think. As he stood thinking, Kate came along, alone. He would have it out with her.

"Who is that man you were talking to on the bridge, Miss Vane?" he asked.

"Mr. Edwards."

"And who, pray, is Mr. Edwards?"

"A gentleman from London."

"Ha! Come to see you?"

"No, sir."

"What makes you so short?"

"I always answer impertinent questions shortly, Mr. Pryor, when I answer them at all," the girl replied coolly.

"What a witness you'd make," thought Pryor. "I didn't mean to be impertinent," he said aloud. "He was with me to-day, asking about Mr. Ellicott, and I thought it odd you should know him — that's all."

This was intended to draw her out, but it failed. She stood confronting him without a change on her hard, handsome face.

"By-the-bye," he continued, "there's that furniture of yours. I was obliged to have it removed from the Mill, as it was in

the way of the new tenants. I've got it stored in an outhouse at home. What do you want done with it?"

"Perhaps it had better be sold—it is of no use to me."

"Who knows," he replied jauntily, "you may be going into housekeeping soon, and though old it is serviceable. There's quite a run on that quaint ugly stuff now."

"Will you buy it?" Kate asked.

"I, no—well, I'll see Mrs. Pryor about it. There is a bureau might suit us. Anyhow, I'll have it valued for you, if you like."

"Name your own price, Mr. Pryor, and take what you want. You are an honourable man. What you say will be right."

"Thank you, but I'd sooner trust a



broker, for both our sakes. What has become of Mrs. Wybert—not ill I hope? We haven't seen her in church for two Sundays."

"She has not left the house for more than a fortnight," said Kate, evading one part of the question. "Now may I ask something?" she added, as though to change the subject.

"Certainly, turn and turn about's fair play."

"Where is Mr. Ellicott?"

"Now, Kate, after the shabby way you treated him, what can it possibly matter to you where he is?"

"That is not turn and turn about, Mr. Pryor. I asked you a question, and you shirk it by putting another."

"Shirk isn't a pretty word, Miss Vane."

"It means evade—make it evade, if you please."

"I really am afraid I must. Mr. Ellicott is travelling on the Continent, and does not want his address to be given."

"What is he afraid of?"

"Afraid of, child! Were you afraid when I asked you about Mr. Edwards?"

"No. Mr. Edwards is here to see Mrs. Wybert about some law business. There is your answer—now give me mine."

"Oh, then he *is* a lawyer!"

"He is here about law business—that is all I know," said Kate, flushing slightly.

"What is Mr. Ellicott afraid of?"

"Of being bothered, my dear; now do you see? Shall I give him your love when I write next?"

"You would make an excellent actor, Mr. Pryor," she said, looking him full in the face. "Did it ever occur to you to go on the stage?"

"Never; and now I think I've given you full measure. I won't forget about the furniture. Good-night."

And so they parted.

"I forgot to ask her if that old vixen had heard from her son," he said to himself as he turned into his shrubbery.

After dinner he told his wife about the gentlemanly stranger.

"He took the same point as you did, my dear," said he, "about Fraser not going to help search for the body."

"Perhaps he is some relation of the

Marstons," ventured Mrs. Pryor. "Why didn't you ask?"

"I only asked him one question about himself, and he lied to it. He told me he wasn't a lawyer, and I find from Kate Vane that he is here with Mrs. Wybert about law business. Depend upon it, my dear, the man is up to mischief. It is only fair to suppose that his inquiries about Fraser have some connection with Mrs. Wybert; but what on earth can she want with him?"

"What indeed?" echoed his spouse.

This took place on a Saturday. The following morning the fashionable congregation which sat under the Rev. F. Marston was increased by two. One of these was our gentlemanly friend Mr. Edwards, in whose well-gloved hand a

very small prayer-book, with a large gilt cross on the cover, was reverently clasped, and who joined in the responses with much fervour—particularly in that part of the service which related to miserable sinners.

The other was a youth of Teutonic appearance, who looked about him and did not seem to know exactly when to stand up and sit down. They were in no hurry to go out when the sermon was over, and the benediction said. Indeed the preacher had time to doff his robes and give some orders to the vergers before they left.

“Now that you see him in his hat,” Mr. Edwards whispered to his companion, “there can be no mistake. Follow him wherever he goes, and report to me every night.”

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It was not until the next Tuesday that Mr. Sidebottom saw that photograph, and Bell went on her pilgrimage to Dale Terrace.



### CHAPTER III.

WE ARE ALL IN THE DARK.

**B**ELL did not ask her father to come in when they arrived at the house. It was as much as she could do to wish him good-night. Thought had gotten up a full head of steam within her, which she dared not blow off just then.

She felt that if she did once begin it would be out of her power to stop, and therefore, like the wise little woman she

was, she kept the valve down, and left the fire to cool. Mr. Marston did not want to come in.

Almost before the door was opened he began his order to the cabman, and was driven away kissing his hand out of the window with a light and airy "ta ta," as though they had been to the opera, and had had a pleasant evening.

Bell gave a stamp of vexation, and rubbed it off on the mat, to save proprieties before the under butler. The stamp did not do Mrs. De Gray any good. What is a woman so deceived, so played with, to do ?

A man can go forth, hunt the truth out, blow off steam from a dozen safety-valves, and in extreme cases find exquisite solace in punching some one's head ! There is small satisfaction in doing



this by deputy, and when the offender is one's own father, the crowning satisfaction is by no means to be obtained.

Bell had no anger left for Madge—she had earned forgiveness by being alive; and not much for her husband—he was loved; a fact which covered a multitude of sins in the estimation of this happy wife and mother. In the blazing injustice of her father, all other fires paled away.

He had known all along that Madge was alive, and yet he had taunted her (Bell) in her agony with being an accessory to her death! He had written that awful letter to poor Fraser, branding him as a murderer! He had locked himself up in his study, and shammed sorrow. That perhaps was his worst offence with the loving sister whose true heart had

been so cruelly wrung. How could she ever again respect him? How could she believe anything he might say, or find truth in anything he might do? And she had left her future communication with Madge dependent upon such a man! As this thought struck her she was within an ace of stopping the cab, and going back to Dale Terrace; but it was too late. She was at her home, and in another minute that pleasant (?) "ta ta" was said.

She found Horace De Gray and Uncle Joe in the smoking-room, with "Polli" and B. and cigars galore! looking disgustingly calm and comfortable.

"So soon!" exclaimed her husband, as she flung herself wearily upon the low, broad divan. "We didn't expect you for another two hours."

"So I perceive," she replied pettishly, with a glance at the unopened bottles. "You've been enjoying yourselves. A pretty place to leave me in."

"My love! you had your father, and we did as he said you wished."

"What did he say?"

"Well, he said a lot of things; Madge was not well enough to receive us; she and you wanted to have a long talk; and he would see you home afterwards. Wasn't that about the sense of it?"

This query was addressed to Uncle Joe, who sat back on the divan, and puffed out several circles of blue smoke before he replied:

"Those were some of his *words*, but if you ask me what was the *sense*, I should say it came to this: 'For God's sake get out of this, for the longer you stay the more lies I shall tell you.'"

Horace looked round for an explosion. Loyal Bell was not the woman to bear this sort of talk about her people, under ordinary circumstances ; but no explosion came. She only bit her lip.

“ You don’t believe in papa ?” she observed, with a sigh.

“ Who could, after his conduct to-day ?” replied Sir Joseph.

“ Uncle Joe, you don’t know a quarter of what he has done, and I must tell you the truth, for I *will* get to the bottom of this wretched business, and you must both help me.”

Then she told them all she knew, and concluded thus :

“ I am sure papa has been there before to-day. I am sure he went to-day to warn them that we had found out where they were. All their things were packed up,

and Madge told me they were going abroad to-night. Why should they be hiding and running away like this? Why should they be afraid of *us*? If Mr. Wybert does not want us, I am sure we don't want to force ourselves on *him*. There is no occasion to shut up that poor child in a back slum, or to drag her over the sea in her present condition, so far as we are concerned."

"He's a brute," snorted her husband.

"No, Horace, she speaks most lovingly of him. She entreated me to receive him kindly, for her sake, if we met. This seems to show he is not afraid of me, at least."

"And answers one of your questions," said Uncle Joe.

"Yes. I only put it to clear the way, as it were. They are not afraid of us.

What I want to get at is—who are they afraid of, and what have they done to be afraid of anybody?"

"I have it!" cried Horace De Gray, starting up and sending the remnant of his "Polli" and B. bubbling over Bell's crape. "Why, of course! You girls were wards in Chancery. Don't you remember I had to get the Lord Chancellor's consent when I married you? Wybert didn't, and the big-wigs are after him."

"Won't do," said Sir Joseph judicially. "The big-wigs don't know they're married. She's dead to all the world but us three, her father, and Wybert."

"You forget that creature Sidebottom," said Bell. "I think there is a great deal in what Horace says. Madge hinted that something Uncle Joe had done caused them to be watched and followed."

"Oh yes! blame me!" expostulated the Baronet.

"No, dear Uncle Joe, I do *not* blame you, and no one shall in my presence. I think you have been most kind, and if trouble has come through you it was because you were so unfairly kept in the dark. Sidebottom is a wretch who would do anything for money. He has told, and Horace is right—the Court of Chancery is after them. Why, when I was a girl, I remember reading in the papers of an Irish gentleman who was put in prison for ever so long, because he ran away with a ward."

"Her family prosecuted. What does a drunken ostler like Sidebottom know of Chancery, or its wards?" persisted Uncle Joe. "Besides, if he were arrested for contempt in not getting the Lord Chan-

cellor's consent, he would be let out as soon as he executed a settlement."

"A settlement? Oh, a marriage settlement," mused Bell.

"Which he don't want to make," retorted Horace. "I'll bet you fifty pounds to a brass-headed nail that I'm right, Uncle Joe. He was awfully hard up. I don't believe he had any appointment at Barbadoes, or he'd have gone after it. If he had, it fell through somehow. He wanted Madge's six thousand pounds, and he's got it; and he means to keep it, and to spend it."

"Horace is right," again said his wife, somewhat proudly.

"Now look here, you're talking nonsense." It is Uncle Joe who speaks; and he clears the table in front of him as though to lay the law down there bodily.



“ I could win that fifty pounds as easily as I could light a cigar, if I wanted. I am a practical man, and when people say this or that has been done in matters which I understand, I ask myself—how ? and if I don't get an answer how it can be done, I don't believe it is done. How could Wybert get that money, which stands in the name of trustees under an order of the court, and is invested in India stock ? Just think ! He would have to prove—first, that Miss Marston is alive ; second, that she is married to him. His ‘ first ’ would have leaked out, and we should all have known it in a week. His ‘ second ’ would have proved him guilty of contempt. Believe me, my dear fellow, that these things are not so easily done as you seem to imagine ; and keep your fifty pounds. You are a splendid hand at building

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bridges, we know, but happily there is a gulf between a rogue and money in Chancery which even you can not span for him. No, sir. *He* has not got these six thousand pounds."

The pause which followed is broken by Bell, who sighs, "You're a wonderfully clever man, uncle! What is there you don't know? I see, now, that it cannot be as Horace supposed; but why did you place such stress upon *he*?"

"Never mind."

"The money is safe?"

"I hope so."

There was that in his tone which sent a sickly chill through his niece.

"Suppose poor Madge had really fallen from the cliffs and been killed," she asked, "who would have got that money?"

"Your father."

"All of it?"

"Every sixpence."

"How unfair upon poor me," said Bell, with what was intended to be a laugh, but proved a dismal failure.

She had caught Uncle Joe's eye—just for a second—and read his thoughts. They were the reflex of her own, and again that sickly chill ran through her. Her husband (who was a master of inelegant posturing) had flung himself back upon the divan, when his theory was demolished, in such a manner that nothing could be seen of him but the soles of his boots and a cigar. In this position he growled :

"What's the use of bothering about what would be if she were dead? She isn't dead. She's only playing the fool."

"I won't have you speak of her like that, Horace," said Bell, flushing up. "Poor dear little Madge! I greatly fear she is suffering for the—the——"

"Fault of another," interposed Sir Joseph, with a meaning glance at his niece.

"I should like to have half an hour's quiet conversation with that fellow Wybert," growled Horace.

"I am afraid it wouldn't be quiet, dear," said his wife.

"As much so as he desires—the cur!"

"Come, come, don't let us abuse anybody," interposed Uncle Joe. "We are all in the dark at present; but I think I can throw some light into the mystery before this time to-morrow." Uncle Joe rose and buttoned his coat. "Good gracious!" he exclaimed, as he consulted

his watch, "past one o'clock! I had no idea it was so late. Good-night; shall you be at home, Bell, about four to-morrow?"

"Yes, yes."

"Well, don't come down. You are worn out, child; go to bed."

"I must see you out. I told the servants not to sit up. I won't be a minute, Horace."

In the hall these two stopped as though by mutual consent, despite the promise not to be a minute.

"Oh, Uncle Joe!" said she, placing her hand on his shoulder and lifting a face down which big tears were rolling. "Can it be that papa has taken that money?"

"My love! one has been so often deceived in this case, that——"

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"Ah, but who has deceived us? Uncle, I do so *loathe* myself for thinking such a thing, and yet where did he get the means to furnish his rooms so expensively, and to buy a horse, and—and live as he does. You know he never saved anything, and is always in debt."

"Let us hope that he is more in debt than ever."

"Oh! you mean he may have got those things on credit," she exclaimed, brightening. "I ought to have thought of that. But, Uncle Joe, why did you look at me so upstairs?"

"It is best to keep these discussions to ourselves, my dear."

"What are you going to do?"

"Find out what has become of Madge's money."

"Then you do suspect?"

He turned aside to open the door, and did not answer her.

"God bless *you*, Bell," he said with feeling. "If they were all open and loyal like you, this sorrow would never have come upon us."

"Madge is sacrificing herself to save papa or somebody. Madge is honest as the day. I don't even think poor papa means to do wrong, but he is so secret, and sometimes so hard pressed. Madge might have given it to him."

"She could not."

"The money is her own."

"Not to give away."

"Could it be replaced if the worst comes to the worst?"

"Perhaps; but let us hope for the best. Good-night."

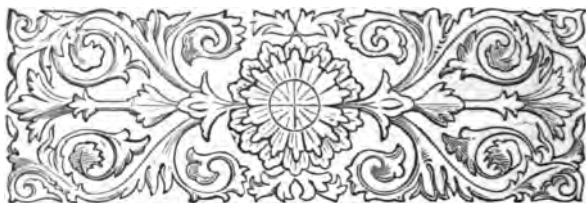
"Horace, dear," she said to her lord

whom she found partially undressed in their chamber, "what would you say if I asked you for six thousand pounds, to-morrow?"

He held the face he knew and loved, and trusted so well, between his great brown hands, and searched it for some moments. There was nothing but tenderness and truth in the soft eyes which met his own without a flinch.

"I should say that there is at least one rogue in this world, and—as usual—a loving woman to help him," he replied.





## CHAPTER IV.

### MADGE'S HUSBAND.

**H**ORACE DE GRAY was on his way to his office, and Uncle Joe had just cut himself whilst shaving, because he *would* get thinking about Madge's money instead of minding what he was doing, when Bell received this telegram :

*" Madge to Mrs. De Gray,*

*" 18, Tyburnia Gardens.*

*" Please come to me at once—I am ill.*

*" MADGE."*

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I have been a dweller in lodgings by land or sea, on and off, for many years ; and yet have a good word for landladies. So has Madge. We think alike, perhaps, upon three rather important points.

1. That people take in lodgers to make a living.

2. That there are, generally, others beside ourselves to be attended to.

3. That having paid for the use of this or that, does not justify us in abusing it.

And so we find peace.

Lodgers who leave at 1 a.m. ; who introduce cabmen and porters into the house, making a racket with luggage at that late hour ; and who come back again sick, as soon as their hosts are in their beauty sleep — must have been good lodgers to be welcomed. Poor pale agonised Madge was welcomed, and the

little life which flickered on the threshold of existence as the dawn began to break, and then went out for ever to the land of the Hereafter, had tender care. Still Bell's arrival was a great comfort—firm, quiet, loving Bell, who moved like a ghost in the darkened room, and acted like a woman.

"If it *had* to come, darling," she whispered, "thank God that it came as it did. What would you have done if you had been taken ill on board the steamer?"

"Oh, but we should have gone. Oh! Bell, if anything happens to him it will be my fault," Madge moans.

"You are thinking of papa?"

"Poor papa! Bell, they will not let my husband come in to me. I must see him, and then he must go. Promise you will make him go. I have you to take

care of me. I—I shall soon get well, and then I can follow him.”

“You are not to excite yourself. You shall see him as soon as the doctor gives leave. Now you are not to talk any more.”

Madge shut her eyes and groaned, “What shall I do? oh! what shall I do?”

“Keep quite quiet, darling. Hush, now—hush! You cannot see him for some time yet anyhow; for he has gone out with the doctor to look for a nurse, and a good one is not to be got at a moment’s notice.”

“You will tell me when he comes back?”

“Yes, I will; but we all want you to try and go to sleep.”

“There will be no sleep for me till I know he is gone. *He must not stay here.*

Oh, if I had only died with my little child, and been out of the way !”

“ If you say another word, Madge, I will leave the room.”

A weak wan hand went out to detain her as she rose, but failed. Bell smoothed the pillows, and kissed her.

“ I will be good,” she murmured. “ Speak to him kindly, Bell, for my sake—promise ?”

“ If you will go to sleep, I’ll kiss him for your sake—there !” replied this artful creature.

And soon afterwards Madge did fall into a doze, whether brought on by this diplomacy or morphine, matters not. She slept, and Bell stole away into the sitting-room to write to Horace and to Uncle Joe ; for in her haste she had not left any message at home—had even carried off the tele-

gram, sent in Madge's name, which would have explained her absence.

As she is writing, a cab is driven up to the door. A quick step is heard on the stair.

"It is Mr. Wybert," says the landlady, who is waiting for the letters.

Bell starts up, and cannot help turning her back to the door. She is not prepared to meet her sister's husband thus suddenly.

She half repents of her promise to kiss him for her sake, and her heart beats fast and rebellious.

The man who has made true Madge Marston false to her plighted troth; who is responsible for the expatriation of poor Fraser Ellicott; the treacherous friend; the disloyal counsellor, will be face to face with her, the moment she has composed herself enough to turn and greet him!

She tries hard to think of him as the man Madge loves ; as the father of her dead child.

Why, *why* does he burst upon her like this without giving her time—and there is no escape !

His touch is on the handle of the door. It opens, and she can feel him start. Perhaps he will not come in. She so hopes he will not. If he would only stay outside for two minutes ! But he advances.

She cannot help it ! She springs to the farthest window and hides her face in her hands. Then she hears a voice—a reproachful voice, which says, “Why, Bell !” and it is not the voice of Mr. Henry Wybert. She turns, and Fraser Ellicott stands before her !

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When cold water and smelling-salts, slapping of hands and cutting of laces have done their work, she lifts up her head, and says :

“ Come and let me kiss you, Fraser. I promised Madge I would kiss her husband, but—no, please don't say anything. I suppose it's all right ; but if you talked with the tongues of angels I could not understand you. My poor head ! Where is Mrs. South ? Oh, there you are ! Thank you so much ; but you look as frightened as though you had seen a ghost. Perhaps he is a ghost. No, ghosts don't kiss.”

“ Why, madam, I thought you knew the gentleman,” says the landlady.

She was getting suspicious. Her lodger's sister turns her back upon her lodger's husband ; faints in his arms ; kisses him



and calls him Fraser when his name is Henry! It is strange conduct, to say the least of it.

"Of course I know him," Bell replies; "but we have not met for so long, and—and—my poor little sister's trouble has quite upset my nerves. I'm all right now. Please send for a cab and let the man deliver these letters at once; and—look here, Mrs. South—take his ticket, and let him come back (practical Bell!) for his money."

"I knew you had been sent for," Fraser says, when Mrs. South had departed on her mission, "but I did not expect you so soon. I'm awfully sorry for having startled you."

"It seems like a dream," Bell muses, with her head in her hands. "And you are really Madge's husband?"

"How could you ever doubt it?" he asked.

"Uncle Joe fancied she had been robbed and murdered by some one who rode over from Ramsden Junction that awful night. The ostler who let him the horse traced him here and said his name was Wybert. We thought—I cannot tell you why just now; my poor head isn't clear enough—that Madge had changed her mind, or had been induced by some falsehood to give you up. And, Fraser! there was that letter."

"Written when I was in a worse state of bewilderment than you are," he says. "I should not have written at all. I should have gone to her at once."

"Oh! why did you not? What misery you would have spared us!"

"Don't reproach me, Bell. Misery was

sure to come upon us somehow or another ; but I have felt—we have both felt—that we ought to have trusted you.”

“ But what have you done ? You had the Lord Chancellor’s consent and papa’s, and the license and everything. In the name of common sense why elope with a girl to whom you were to be married the next day ? Why hide under a false name ? ”

“ I had to hide, dear Mrs. De Gray—speak low, please. Even now I am in very great danger. If it had not been for my poor darling’s illness, we should have been in Spain to-night. As to the name, I had to assume a false one and, without thinking of the consequences, I took on a sudden demand, one ” (a spasm of pain passes over his face as he speaks) “ that was uppermost

—God help me!—in my thoughts; and there was no going back from it. The ostler was right. I do pass here as Henry Wybert.”

“But you are really Fraser Ellicott?” Bell demands in a shaky voice and rubbing her eyes. “I’m not going to believe anything now that I cannot see, and feel. Come here and let me touch you. Oh, how pale and worn you look! — Yes, you are not a dream, and you are Fraser Ellicott.”

“No doubt of that,” he replies, with a shadow of a smile upon his haggard face.

“*Then, sir,*” says a harsh voice from the door, “*you must consider yourself my prisoner.*”

“Prisoner!” Bell repeats, with a spasm at her heart for which she cannot yet

account. "It's all nonsense. You had papa's consent."

"We know all about the elopement, madam," says the man, advancing. "That is quite another matter. The warrant which I hold against Mr. Ellicott is for the wilful murder of that same Mr. Wybert you mentioned just now, at Beckhampton, on the night of the 27th of last June, and if he behaves himself like a gentleman he will not have anything to complain of about me."

"It has come at last!" The hunted, haunted man gives almost a sigh of relief as the detective places a hand on his shoulder. "Dear friend" (this to Bell, who stands like a tottering image of wonder by his side), "it is better so. I should have faced it out at first. Please take care of poor Madge, and break it to her

gently. She is quite blameless, and I am not so bad as they try to make me out. I——”

“Least said, soonest mended, sir,” interrupts the detective. “If you want to say anything, I warn you I shall take it down in writing, and it may be used in evidence against you at the trial.”

“Can I not say a few words in private to this lady?—she is my wife’s sister,” Fraser asks.

The detective went to the window, looked out, tapped at it, and then replied :

“Five minutes.”

But he gave him ten.

They pass into Madge’s room, and find her still asleep. There, in whispers, the tale is told. He cannot even wish his wife

good-bye ; he may only kiss the pillow where perhaps her cheek will rest when she turns.

"Where am I to go?" he asks when the ten minutes is over and he rejoins his captor.

"To Beckhampton ; and if we're sharp we shall catch the 3.20 train," is that officer's reply.

"And we will follow you," says Bell, "as soon as Madge can be moved. Uncle Joe shall go down to-night. Depend upon me to nurse her ; I will not leave her for an hour. And cheer up, dear Fraser. Let me tell her that you bore it bravely, and were confident. I believe every word you have told me, and it shall be proved. I say it *shall*, sir ! How dare you smile like that !"

The detective is the victim of this

outburst; but he bore it placidly. He had heard the same sort of thing before.

In the course of the day, Mr. Marston and Uncle Joe arrive—sent for, as we know, to be told of Madge's illness; but to be apprised of a greater misfortune.

The doctor comes, too. Being only informed that the lady's husband is in trouble, he sternly insists that nothing which can agitate her is to be said for the next two days at least.

Good luck favours them. When Madge wakes, her first words are :

*"Has he gone?"*

Bell replies truly, "Yes, love;" but without saying where. "He did not like to waken you," continues this conspirator;



“but he kissed the pillow, just here. Shall I turn you?”

She did not turn again all that day.

Uncle Joe is not the least to be pitied of the unhappy trio who watch the sufferer. No one reproaches him as yet, but he cannot help blaming himself for that day's work.

If he had only been quiet, kept his theories to himself, and allowed Mr. William Sidebottom to relapse into obscurity, Fraser Ellicott might never have been discovered. He had shot at a crow, and killed the pet pigeon. This was why Bill “the Roper” had been looked after by some one else.

But whence came the original information upon which the charge of murder was based? That they would know to-morrow

at Beckhampton before the justices. His offer to go there and assist in the preparation of Fraser's defence is eagerly declined by Mr. Marston.

"I begged you, over and over again," he says, in a tone of mingled reproach and resignation which was very hard to put up with, "to leave us alone."

"You should have told the truth, sir," Uncle Joe retorts, buttoning up his coat and getting red. "You are as much to blame as I am—more. It all comes out of your miserable habit of concealment."

"No, my good brother, out of your foolish love of meddling in what does not concern you."

"It did concern me. It concerned the honour of our family. You don't know half of what was said of Madge down at Laremouth."

"There have been concealments on both sides, I see," sighs the ex-vicar; "concealment from her father!"

"Why, good heavens!" cries Uncle Joe, "you gave us no chance to consult with you. You locked yourself up, pretending to be overcome with grief; you would not see even Bell. When at last we did get you to speak, it was only to bring out a long set of arguments against the probability of this and that, when three words would have settled it all. You might have trusted me, Mr. Marston. They would have been safe now if you had."

"If you had done me the common justice of supposing I was acting for the best, Sir Joseph, they would never have been discovered."

"You call what you did 'acting for the best?'"

“I do. He had told Madge all that happened. For anything he or I could know, he might have been arrested the next day. He had to marry her, and thus stop her mouth as a witness against him. Chance gave us a splendid excuse to account for them both. She was dead; he had gone abroad to recover from his grief. What could have been better? You are wonderfully wise after the event. Put yourself in my place—a half-crazy man, a headstrong girl, and not a moment to be lost! Surely I have been made to suffer enough without these reproaches!”

Thus Mr. Marston, with tears in his voice.

He does not tell them quite all that passed in his study that night. He does not say that Fraser paid him six thousand

pounds down as the price of his co-operation. We see now why the pearl-clasp was sold, and Fraser wanted six fifty-pound notes.

The letter to Pryor, purporting to come from Madrid, and referring to an imaginary predecessor, was another of Mr. Marston's little tricks. He sent it to Spain by an acquaintance who was travelling that way, and got him to post it "for a parishioner who was in trouble about a bill."

Having the fear of Mrs. Grundy constantly before my eyes, and not wishing that any unmerited slur should be cast upon little Madge—who has surely enough to bear!—I feel called upon to state that every propriety consistent with an elopement had been observed. But, of course, it was all dreadfully improper; and I beg to assure my kind critics that I

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am not in favour of gentlemen killing any one, and running away with ladies they are about to marry—as a general rule.



## CHAPTER V.

IT LOOKS LIKE TRUTH.



O the young Squire re-enters Beckhampton a prisoner, charged with the worst of crimes, and is taken straight before the justices. Popular feeling is in favour of the accused, and Kate Vane, upon whose evidence it appears that the warrant for his arrest has been obtained, is supposed to be out of her mind.

Her conduct in refusing to accompany

her relatives to Australia, in rejecting Fraser Ellicott's service, in remaining at the Mill during the floods, in quitting it so mysteriously, in coming back to live with Mrs. Wybert, is discussed, and not to her advantage.

She gives her evidence with great self-possession, and Pryor, who appears on behalf of the prisoner, wisely declines to cross-examine her for the present.

Pryor has been clerk to the magistrates in his time, and there is not a dodge of the criminal law worth knowing, that is not at his fingers' ends. He waits to see what the promised corroborative testimony will come to, and gladly submits to the required remand.

At present the case stands thus :—Mrs. Wybert deposes that there was bad blood between Mr. Ellicott and her son, and that



on the morning of the 27th June, as they parted in the road leading from the railway station, she heard the former say in an angry voice, "*Look out for yourself, for if I get a chance I'll smash you.*" She identifies a hat which had been picked up out of the water near the Mill, by one Job Benson, as the one worn by her son that day.

Katherine Vane swears that, having left the old Hall about nine o'clock on the night in question, she wandered about the outskirts of the town, not knowing what to do or where to go.

She was greatly excited, she says. She thought there was some plan to keep her at the Hall against her will. She was afraid to go to the Mill alone, as it was so late—past eleven by that time. She sat down under the railroad bridge, and thinks

she may have gone to sleep again. She was so tired and outdone.

When she next began to consider, her head was much clearer. She was not afraid then. She started homeward as fast as she could walk, and as she was crossing the bridge over the river, she saw Mr. Henry Wybert and the prisoner going together down the steps that led to the path along the Beck.

They were talking. The prisoner seemed angry. He had hold of Mr. Wybert by the elbow, and seemed to be forcing him along. They walked about four hundred yards along the path. Then the prisoner took two quick steps in advance, turned round suddenly, and struck Mr. Wybert on the side of his head with something he had in his hand. She could not say if it were a life-preserver.

Mr. Wybert fell just on the brink of the stream, and the prisoner ran about half way back to the bridge, when he appeared to change his mind. He went back to where Mr. Wybert lay, and kicked his body into the river.

Yes, it was dark. If they had not passed her so close, she should not have recognised them. How did she know it was the prisoner who struck the blow? He was the taller of the two; besides, he came back alone. Did she hear what they were saying as they went down the steps? No; except that the prisoner said, "*But you shall,*" just as he took Mr. Wybert by the arm. Why had she not raised an alarm? She was frightened. She ran all the way to the Mill. Afterwards, when she began to think it over, she was afraid no one would believe her,

as it was known that she did not like the prisoner.

Was that all? No; she was waiting for the body to be found, to bear her story out. That is why she remained at the Mill. That is why she came back to Mrs. Wybert. She did not know he was going to Barbadoes, and when his mother said something (what it was the law of evidence did not allow her to be asked), she told all she knew.

That was the case for the present.

Mr. Pryor accompanied his client to the county jail, and had a long conference with him.

"I am afraid I am getting rusty in criminal business," the lawyer began, "and should like to retain Callendar for the next hearing. He is the best cross-examiner on the circuit, and everything

depends upon our breaking down that girl."

Fraser lifted a pale, haggard face, and asked :

"What do you mean by breaking her down?"

"Showing that she is either a lunatic or a liar, out of her own mouth," Pryor replied. "Of course she is one or the other. The only question is whether this should be done now, or at the trial? If we do it now, there would be an end of the case, if the magistrates do not take it into their heads that because you are a gentleman they must send you to the assizes."

"And if they did so?"

"Then it would be better to postpone the cross-examination. Not to show our hand; don't you see?"

"Pryor," his client replied, "neither you, nor Callendar, nor all the world can break her down, because she has a cool head, and is telling the truth."

"The truth!" cried the lawyer, aghast.

"The truth as far as it goes," Fraser replies; "but not quite the whole truth. I have heard that a man should trust his doctor or his lawyer all in all, or not at all. I'm going to trust you all in all, Pryor, for you are my friend as well as my advocate—are you not?"

"Speak low then," says Pryor, pressing his outstretched hand.

"When Sam left me on the bridge," Ellicott began, after a pause, "I was the happiest man in the world. You had all been so kind and cordial—the Rector particularly. I had begun to realise what it would be to have a home. I thought of

my next birthday, how we would keep it, and what might happen before it came. Such castle-building in the air! There was a little cradle, and my own true Madge leaning over it, in the clouds, where I ought to have seen a gallows."

"Tush! Stick to facts."

"Well, Wybert came up the steps. I had tried to make friends with him in the morning, and failed. Like a fool I tried again. I must tell you that when we quarrelled first, he said that if he had had the means to kill me I should have been a dead man. I thought it was empty brag at the time, and soon forgot all about it. Now I wanted to be friends with him. I hadn't treated him fairly, and I knew it would please my wife for us to make up. And I was a little piqued at his holding out so. At first he would not listen to

me, and I tried to pass on. Then I took him by the arm—just as the girl says—and I may have said, ‘But you shall,’ I don’t remember; I led him down again to the path, thinking we should be quieter there. I again told him I was sorry for having been so rough with him, and I made him an offer (never mind what it was) which, if he had accepted it, would have kept him at home with his mother. Kate Vane is mistaken in supposing that I went on in front. It was he who lagged behind to think over (as I supposed) what I had said. The next thing I knew was that he had struck me a tremendous blow on the head from behind. Do you see this scar?”

He bent down as he spoke, and Pryor traced a long white seam extending from nearly the crown to the ear.



"One inch fuller on the top and you would not be here to show it," Pryor observes grimly ; "go on."

"I had a stone in my hand," Fraser resumed, "some devil, I believe, put it on the coping of the bridge, and I was balancing and tossing it idly as we went along. Before I ever knew I was hurt—except a sort of sick, dizzy feel—I swirled round and caught him full on the temple with that stone. All the strength of my arm and all the weight of my body went into the blow. I was furious at his treachery—and down he went. I did stagger back towards the bridge. I was half stunned, faint, and bleeding like a pig. I leaned against the fence—you know where—and must have stopped there a good half hour by what I remember now, for I had barely time to catch the twelve-

ten train, . after——” he drew himself together with a shudder.

“I did not kick him into the water, Pryor. I swear by God I did not; but I can understand why she thinks I did. I found him stretched on the very brink of the swollen river—half his body in the water, which was rising fast and running very strong. His face was turned up to the sky and the rain pattered on it. How strange it is what little things come over us at such times, and how we remember them! I thought that the worst thing happening to him was the rain beating upon his face. I dried and covered it with my handkerchief, and stooped to raise him out of the water, As I did so, the bank—undermined by the flood—gave way under one foot, and as I sprang back, in he went. I dare say it looked

in the dark as though I had kicked him."

"You seem very anxious to support that girl," said Pryor.

"I want to warn you off false scents."

"You have given me such a surprise as I have not had for a long time," says Pryor, with a long-drawn sigh. "What did he strike you with?"

"I cannot say."

"Could it have been a life-preserver?"

"It might; why do you ask?"

"Because one was found under the ruins of Dr. Byng's wall."

"Then that will bear out my statement," says Fraser, brightening up.

"My dear sir, don't you know that in criminal cases the prisoner's statements can only be taken *against* him?"

“I do, but suppose on cross-examination Kate Vane tells the whole truth?”

“Oh! then you’re safe; but will she tell the whole truth? That girl is obstinacy personified; she says she was frightened. She soon got over that. You say it was near midnight when—well, when he fell into the river. It must have taken her at least twenty minutes to get to the Mill, even if she ran all the way. At one o’clock she was cool enough to calculate to an inch how high the water had risen as compared with other floods, and to a yard where the dam should be cut. She stayed in the Mill-house when every one was sure it would cave in. She is just the sort of woman to stick to a lie through thick and thin if she took it into her head to do so.”

"Aye, 'if;' but she can have no motive but to tell the truth," observes Fraser.

In answer to this observation, he learned to his intense surprise what had passed between Mrs. Aymes and Kate about himself. He is unable to recall anything he had said or done to give her offence.

"Well," Pryor observes at last, "it is no use speculating about it. We shall know next Thursday. Please to go on with your story. Did you have that wound on your head dressed?"

"No. I did not dare. I bound it up as well as I could and rushed for the train. They will say I was a cur not to have jumped in after him. I just saw the body roll round and the face come up slowly in the turbid water. Then the

eddy took it and whirled it away. Pryor, if by raising one finger I could have had him out on the bank safe, sound, and friendly, I could not have raised it. If an angel from heaven had cried, 'You are running straight for the gallows,' I could not have stopped.

"I reached my London lodgings before any one was up, let myself in with my latch-key, changed my clothes, and destroyed everything that had marks of blood upon it. I had some plaster and lint there with which I dressed my wound, and you see I did not make a bad job of it."

"I see nothing of the sort," groaned Pryor. "Do you mean to say that nobody knew you were hurt?"

"Not a soul. When the servant came in the morning I said I had a bad head-

ache (which was true), and did not want to be disturbed. I then tried to write to my wife."

"You mentioned your 'wife' once before," Pryor interrupted. "I suppose you mean your wife that was to have been—poor Miss Marston."

"I forgot that you did not know," said Fraser, with a start. "It must all come out now. She is alive, Pryor, and we are married. I told you I tried to write and explain what had happened, but I could not. I posted a letter, in which I told her, without explanation, that our marriage must be postponed. As my mind became clearer, I feared the shock this might produce, and determined to go down at all risks that night, tell her all, and escape to Spain. Please to remember that I then expected to hear the murder of Wybert

cried in the streets, and to be arrested for it at any moment; and in such a state of horrid fear and uncertainty I have lived, God help me, up to yesterday.

"Well, my poor Madge always had a presentiment that she would bring me bad luck; and once, when everything seemed bright and happy, she made me promise that if trouble came we should fight it down together. When I told her why I had to fly, she swore I should not go alone. She had an idea that her father could marry us then and there, and I was not much wiser; but he set us right."

"You told him all?" Pryor asked sharply.

"No; I got as far as *Wybert is dead*, and I suppose he saw the rest in my face. He stopped his ears, and forbade me to say another word, except in answer to his



questions. 'Does she know?' he asked. I told him yes. 'All?' 'Yes, all.' 'Then,' he said, 'you must run away with her, and be married as quickly as you can, or she may help to 'hang you.' So we left that night, met him in London the next day, obtained a special license, and were married at lodgings we took in Camberwell."

"By Mr. Marston?"]

"Yes. He joined us in London and got the license."

"And, I suppose, made up that pleasant little story about his daughter having fallen over the cliff?"

"No; accident suggested that. I got Madge to meet me at a favourite nest of hers on the cliff, where her nubia blew off, and this being found half-way down next day, gave rise to the theory that she had fallen. Mr. Marston found the story, and

improved upon it—chance made it. He advised us not to go abroad. He said that the foreign-going steamers would be surely watched, as soon as the murder was out, and that London was the best place to hide in.”

“He was right there,” Pryor remarks.

“But you wrote to me from Spain.”

“That was Mr. Marston’s plan for getting money to go abroad when we found out I was watched. I could not draw as usual without letting out where I was. We have no extradition treaty with Spain, so I pretended to be there to throw them off the scent.”

“Who do you call ‘them?’”

“I don’t know their names. People, I suspect, employed by Mrs. Wybert; but that rascal Mason, Mr. Marston’s butler, was at the bottom of it.”

"You shall tell me why you think so presently," Pryor interposed; "my mind is running on something else now. Were you and Miss Marston married in your right names?"

"Of course."

"But when you were arrested you called yourself Wybert—what on earth made you do that?"

"I had to give a name at our lodgings, and forgot the one (Fraser) which we had fixed upon to assume. Wybert was in my mind, and out it came. I was taken aback. It is not so easy to act up to a false name, and answer to it, as some people think."

I have left the reader to imagine Pryor's astonishment at hearing that Madge was alive, and I shall leave Fraser to tell him such further details of his story as

have been elsewhere stated. At the end, Mr. Pryor summed it up as follows :

“ Now, just observe what comes of being *clever*. This affair of yours was justifiable homicide, if all the facts could come out, and manslaughter at the worst ; but you and Mr. Marston between you have carefully suppressed every sort of evidence to make it short of wilful murder. More than this, you have followed a line of conduct which is inconsistent with innocence, and consistent with guilt.”

“ I should have given myself up at once—I wish I had,” said Fraser.

“ Why of course ! A man could not have given you that wound after he had received a death-blow. It would have borne out your case that he had attacked you first.”

“But there is the scar.”

“Yes, and if you were to call fifty doctors, not one of them would swear to its exact age. Of itself it does not help you. To be of any good, you would have to show that the wound was inflicted at the very time and place sworn to by Kate Vane; and you have carefully shut out the possibility of doing so. If you had shouted for help, and been found fainting and bleeding that night on the spot, or even had the wound dressed in London, you might have gone to your wedding a free man.”

“It is no use discussing ‘might have beens,’ Pryor.”

“That’s true. I must send for Callendar now. This has got beyond me. Anyhow two heads are better than one. There is a line of defence that may

save you, but it is an awfully risky one."

"My best defence is the truth, Pryor. I did not mean to kill him. I struck him back in the instinct of self-defence, against a treacherous attack. I shall say so before the magistrates on Thursday."

"You will do no such folly. You will leave your case in Callendar's hands, and mine; you have damaged it quite enough already, so pray hold your tongue," replied his adviser warmly. "You have others to think of beside yourself."

Thursday came, and Kate Vane stood up to be cross-examined by the famous Serjeant Callendar, who got nothing out of her that was of the slightest value to

his client. The other witnesses for the prosecution appeared and built up a formidable case against him.

His first quarrel with Wybert (seen through the window by the latter's coachman), his midnight flight to London, his visit in disguise to Laremouth, his elopement with the girl he was to marry openly next day, his hiding under a false name in obscure lodgings, were proved, link by link, by Mason, Sidebottom, Master Peter Brown, Mrs. South, and gentlemanly Mr. Edwards, the detective in charge of the case.

Callendar made a gallant attempt to shut out evidence of the elopement. He was funny, pathetic, and indignant by turns; but it wouldn't do. The magistrates considered that Kate Vane's story was supported by the subsequent conduct

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of the prisoner, and they committed him for trial to the next assizes, for the wilful murder of Henry Lane Wybert.





## CHAPTER VI.

### A CONSULTATION.

“HAT rascal Mason” was not quite at the bottom of it. If we go down to the bed rock, we shall find the peculiar cleverness of the Hon. and Rev. Frank Marston. Mason was an excellent servant; looked very wise, and was very stupid; had been in service since he was old enough to wear buttons, never answered back, and if told to pack up his master’s things for a visit

to the planet Venus, would have done as he was told without a remark.

Warned by the use made of him by the young man from the *Mercury*, he had determined to say no more about that figure which had passed his window, and almost made up his mind that master was right, and it was, after all, nothing but an owl, magnified by imagination and the fog.

If, therefore, the Vicar had kept him in his service till he moved to London, and then discharged him with a good character and an extra five-pound note, gentlemanly Mr. Edwards would have lost his best ally. As it was, the Vicar, hating the sight of what gave him uneasiness, and following his old course of putting trouble out of the way, picked a quarrel with Mr. Mason, dismissed him without notice,

and threw his letters asking for a character into the fire. This put up the ex-butler's back.

Gentlemanly Mr. Edwards, employed by Mrs. Wybert to hunt Fraser Ellicott, traced him to London, and losing the scent there, naturally made his first "cast" Laremouth way. He found Mr. Mason lodging at the grocer's, full of anger and news. He wormed out all that Uncle Joe had discovered—and more, but for the second time lost his quarry in Babylon the Great. He discovered Mr. Sidebottom, and had him watched.

The hint dropped by Pryor that Fraser Ellicott was in communication with his father-in-law, placed him also under surveillance ; so that when he rushed away from Tyburnia Gardens nominally to compose himself, but really to warn the hid-ers

that Uncle Joe knew their scent, he was followed ; and the rest was A B C to Mr. Edwards.

Now Mr. Edwards went to Laremouth, half convinced that Mrs. Wybert was a crazy woman, and Kate Vane an adventuress who sought to live upon her credulity. According to the widow's statement, her son had left by the half-past nine o'clock train to take ship for Barbadoes. How, then, could Kate have seen him between eleven and twelve? It was only when Mason's story was told and corroborated, that the detective felt there was a case.

Madge bears the bad news bravely. "I am half glad," she says, when she is allowed to speak about it, "that this miserable hiding and suspense is over. Papa says there will be a great scandal,

and that we should go abroad for a year or two till people have forgotten all about it; but I say *no*. Poor Fraser has had enough of that sort of thing. We shall face it out and fight it down."

She can imagine only one end to the trial, especially as the chief witness is one who *saw* the fray. They dare not tell her that this witness coolly and decisively negatives every question put in the prisoner's favour, and sticks unswervingly to facts which make it a cold-blooded murder.

Beckhampton is the last assize town on the Greenshire Circuit, and the judges will not reach it till the end of August. This gives the prosecution plenty of time to send out to Barbadoes, and have witnesses in attendance to prove—if necessary—that

Henry Wybert had never reached that favoured isle.

His mother has badgered the Treasury into undertaking the conduct of the case ; and the gentleman who attends to the criminal business of that department knows Mr. Callendar well, and does not trust him with the least loophole.

It is a peculiarity of the learned Serjeant that, if permitted to find one, however small, he will worry it into a chasm as big as the Caves of Elephanta in half an hour, without saying a word you can challenge as deceptive. He cannot, as yet, pick a hole in Kate Vane's neat brown silk dress, and thus delivers himself at a consultation held in his chambers in the Temple, at which Pryor and Sam, who is to be his junior, are present :

"I tell you what, Pryor ; this is about

as ticklish a case as I ever had. Talk about the folly of criminals! This innocent young man appears to have taken the greatest pains to put the rope round his throat. And I believe his story. It is one of the strongest I know in favour of altering the law, and letting a prisoner give evidence for himself."

"I pity him if it were altered, and you were on the other side," says Pryor.

"I accept the compliment, but not the reasons," Serjeant Callendar observes. "With even an average judge on the bench, a prisoner would not be unfairly pressed. Our bar do not labour prosecutions, and wisely; for juries would very soon throw themselves in the other scale if they did. I don't think that innocent people would suffer a bit by the change;

but it would play the deuce with our business—eh, Mr. Pryor?”

This was directed to Sam. The Serjeant has a pleasant way with his juniors, and he treats this one (with his second brief) as though he were one of the leaders of the circuit.

“Now look here,” the Serjeant continues. “We can’t get out the real truth of this case, and have got to conduct it as though we were playing a game of skill, and all concerned in it were bits of wood or ivory, having certain moves and values. We ought to be able to conduct it as though they were men and women, and get the truth out of them anyhow.”

“As they do in France?” Pryor puts in.

“No, sir. The thing is done badly and unfairly in France, and that is the reason why you think it would be bad and unfair



here. In France they also make the prosecution of crime into a game of skill, by rushing into the opposite extreme of error. We should never do that; judges wouldn't stand it, nor juries, nor the press. We should not compel a man to criminate himself, or trap him into confession."

"Have you considered the awful lot of perjury your plan would produce?" Sam asked.

"Yes. When I was at sessions, about every other clearly convicted thief voluntarily swore by all that is holy that he was innocent; and afterwards, when sentenced, put his tongue in his cheek, and declared he could do it on his head. I doubt if you can make such people much worse. Anyhow, is it logical to forbid one man to tell the truth because a dozen others are sure to tell lies? That's the

point ! Must Fraser Ellicott be convicted of murder for fear the Artful Dodger should commit perjury ?”

“ It won’t do, Serjeant,” says Pryor the elder, who has been shaking his head for some time at what he considers rank treason. “ It won’t do. Your civil business has spoiled you, and made you unfaithful to the principles of your youth. How many times have I heard you wither up some wretched policeman because he had presumed to ask your Artful Dodger a question !”

“ I’m not defending prisoners now,” replied the Serjeant dryly ; “ I’m talking sense.”

“ Then admit that the more innocent a man is, the more he makes a fool of himself when accused. Why, I once heard a judge say that if a policeman were to

come up suddenly and touch him on the shoulder, he should run—he could not help it.”

“I am with you in all that. I place very little importance upon what a man does or says when he first feels the net. I am against all hole-in-the-corner badgerings and pumpings of prisoners, and would exclude everything they say or do whilst in custody, until they stand up in open court, before their judge and their jury and their fellow-men. Then I say they ought to be heard upon their oath, if they please to take one. If the guilty convict themselves, so much the better for society. If the innocent get off, so much the better for themselves. Now to business. We’ve got to deal with the law as it is ; and, as it is, I don’t see how we can edge in even a suggestion of provocation.”

“Don’t you think,” Sam insinuates, “that the girl Vane, if pressed, would admit that a blow might have been struck in the dark without her seeing it?”

“It will be dangerous to press the girl Vane,” the Serjeant replies; “she’s devilish good-looking, and if we made her cry it would be all over with us. It might, perhaps, be coaxed out of her; but I would not rely upon that. From what I have seen of her, she is a most dangerous witness—one to be handled in the softest of gloves, and asked as few questions as possible. If we cannot get at the truth, we must make a case as like it as possible. In the meantime let this girl be watched, and find out what you can about her past life. Her conduct at the Mill during the flood, and to Mrs. Aymes, does not seem

very rational. Do you think she may be labouring under delusions?"

"You forget," Pryor replies, "that our client admits the truth of all she says."

"That's the devil of it!" muses the Serjeant. "She was there—it's no use denying it. Well, if the worst comes to the worst, we must take the bull by the horns. They have to prove the murder, and that's not so easy *without a body*."

As soon as Madge is able to move, she comes to Beckhampton, and takes up her quarters in the old Hall, which is swept and garnished from cellar to roof for her reception. She is driven in an open carriage to the county jail on "visiting" days, and spends all the time allowed by regulation with the prisoner, her husband. Other days she spends going about

amongst the poor people, doing a great deal of good.

Bell pays her a visit (with the brats), and so does Uncle Joe, The Rector, Mr. May of the bank, and the Pryors are invited now and again to meet these guests at entertainments which are studiously reserved.

Madge's hospitality is in half-mourning for the absent host. Madge's behaviour says, "I don't mope, because I have no fear; and I won't defy public opinion, because I respect it." But she is full of fear and trembling within. She speaks with the utmost confidence of "after the assizes," and her example is catching, as it is intended to be. In her heart of hearts she shudders at the word, for now she knows what sort of a witness Kate Vane is.

Of course there is a faction which accuses her of "bad taste," "brazen conduct," "acting a part," and so on. If she had shut herself up in a room and wept, these good folks would have said, "She knows he's guilty, poor thing!" and have fixed a day for the hanging. This clique is rendered furious by the news that Madge has bowed to Mrs. Wybert—bowed to her from her carriage on the way to the jail!

The policy thus pursued is dictated by Uncle Joe and approved by Pryor, who turns the tables upon Mr. Marston by entreating him to keep away and taking counsel with Sir Joseph.

Indeed, there was at one time a serious reason why the ex-vicar of Laremouth should keep himself in the background, as he was considered to have made himself an accessory after the fact to the murder.

More lenient advice prevailed, and he is to be put in the witness-box for the prosecution, instead of in the dock.

August comes, and the assizes for the county of Greenshire are opened "with the usual formalities." The High Sheriff's carriage stands in the main street opposite the principal hotel; the High Sheriff's London coachman is on the box with a big posy stuck in his waistcoat; the High Sheriff's London footmen (in their elegant livery of green plush unmentionables, scarlet vests and white coats, with yellow shoulder-knots; their mighty calves resplendent in the pinkest of all possible silk stockings) blossom, like variegated hollyhocks, against the porch—the observed of all observers. They have been brought from town specially for this occasion, and



give themselves airs accordingly. Around the carriage stand a score of yokels in green coats and red collars. They seem as though they had dressed in a hurry, and each had put on some one else's clothes. They carry blue poles with a modified bill-hook stuck in the top, and are consequently the High Sheriff's javelin-men. They are not clever in the management of their weapons, the butt-ends of which have an affinity for the inside of their neighbour's legs when in the "carry," and the other extremities a nack of bonneting the man behind when shouldered.

Farther on, on the opposite side of the street, are two individuals, similarly attired, who grasp more aggressive instruments—trumpets; with which they deafen her Majesty's lieges whenever a judge or their master gets in or out of that carriage on

any pretence whatever. This accounts for the secret and rapid manner in which those dignitaries dodge in and out of the vehicle.

The High Sheriff has had his luncheon, and escorted by his deputies, appears in the hall of the hotel. They are dressed in court coats, cocked hats, swords, and—*trousers!* for the *Custos Rotulorum* of Greenshire has not good legs.

“Attention!” is the word. The javelin-men fall into line, the footmen open the carriage door, and the High Sheriff plunges in as though it were a bath. But he is no match for the trumpeters. They have seen him flash past, and he must take the consequences. Away go the trumpets, away goes the carriage, and away go three hats sped by shouldered javelins, to such remarks as, “Mind what you’re arter,

Bill," "It ain't me," and "I'll punch your 'ed." Away they all go to the Judge's lodging, where his lordship is wigged and waiting. Encumbered with his robes, he cannot hope to elude the vigilance of the trumpeters. As soon as they catch sight of the front curl of his wig, they fire away; and he is deafened for the next twenty minutes. Then they are blown into the Court House where the Commission of Assize, Oyer and Terminer, and general Gaol Delivery is read to the old woman who sweeps out that edifice, and several small boys who skirmish about the back benches, munching apples. Then they are blown out again, and into church, when they are preached at by the Sheriff's chaplain. More trumpetings announce the Judge's return to his lodgings and the Sheriff's safe arrival at his hotel; and this

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over, Beckhampton is safe from further trumpeting for that day, and the Commission is opened "with the usual formalities."



## CHAPTER VII.

### THE BECKHAMPTON MURDER.



HE trial of the Beckhampton murder is fixed for the 23rd August, and will commence at the sitting of the court. Mr. Dale, Q.C., leader of the circuit—a gentleman whose usual costume and unrelenting solemnity of manner had gained for him at the bar mess the sobriquet of “the undertaker”—leads for the prosecution.

“With him” are Mr. Wiggins, a

shining light at Sessions, and the Honourable Septimus Sponger, a young gentleman with canary-coloured hair and an eye-glass, who saunters round the circuit with a view to a revisorship as soon as his particular judge should come, and oust the present hard-working incumbent of that office.

The Crown Court—a masterpiece of discomfort, the principal feature of which is a gallery so constructed that none but the occupants of front seats can hear anything, and supported by pillars, meant to be ornamental, but which only obstruct the view below—is crowded to suffocation. All Beckhampton is there. The grand jury box is full of ladies, and even the back seats of the gallery aforesaid are the subject of intrigues and scuffles.

The Greenshire is a short and easy

circuit, and is therefore chosen by the seniors of the bench. This time the criminal business of Beckhampton falls to Justice Starling—a just and humane man, but one who has his crotchets, and cannot quite forget that he was once a great advocate.

Uncle Joe has a seat next to Sam Pryor. Madge is at the Hall, waiting with beating heart for news how goes the day, and Bell is with her. Serjeant Callendar has his usual place near the jury, whence he can wink at them when desirable, and watch—as is his wont—the effect of the evidence upon their minds.

Fraser Ellicott—looking terribly ill and worn—is arraigned for the wilful murder of Henry Lane Wybert.

“Upon his arraignment” (I quote the

formula used by the Clerk of the Crown), "he pleads Not guilty, and so for trial puts himself upon his country, which country you (the jury) are."

Dale Q.C. rises slowly, majestically almost. He has a slight tremor in his voice, which adds, if possible, to the solemnity of his tone and language. There is no more deadly prosecutor at the bar ; for whilst stating a case in the clearest and most damaging manner, he always leaves the impression that he could say much more if he pleased, but for feelings of humanity towards the prisoner.

After having entreated the jury to discard all impressions they may have formed upon the case, and dilating upon the awful character of the issue involved, he takes up the end of the thread and



unwinds it slowly, inch by inch, link by link, until it seems as though he were weaving the hangman's halter. He will prove, he says, an old quarrel between the prisoner at the bar and the deceased, in which the former was guilty of personal violence. He will prove that this quarrel existed up to, or was renewed upon, the day of the murder. He will call a witness who saw the prisoner fell Wybert to the earth, and throw his body into the swollen waters of the Beck. That witness, he is bound to admit, and he does so unhesitatingly, is uncorroborated as to what she saw ; but her evidence will be borne out, if he be rightly instructed, by a chain of facts which prove her to be the witness of truth.

He will produce a hat (which will be sworn to as the one worn by the

deceased that night), and where was it found? In the overflow of the river. How got it there? That would be for the jury to say. The brim of this hat on the left side was broken as though by a blow.

He would produce an instrument called a life-preserver, which was discovered near the place where the deceased fell. How got it there? That would be for the jury to say.

He would prove that the prisoner at the bar was engaged to be married to a young lady with the full consent and approbation of her family, and that the wedding was arranged for the day but one after the murder.

He would show that late on the very night of the murder, almost on the eve of what was to be a happy, long-settled

marriage, the prisoner went in disguise to the house of his betrothed and eloped with her!—carried her off to an obscure suburb of London, where he assumed the name of the man he had struck down on the banks of the Beck. Why? That would be for the jury to say.

It would be improper for him to allude to the story which was got up to account for the young lady's disappearance. That lady was now the prisoner's wife, and could not be called as a witness against him.

It would be his (the learned counsel's) painful duty, however, to call her father—a clergyman of the church of England—to prove the fact of that elopement and secret marriage; and if he could state any reasons, consistent with inno-

cence, for it—the eminent advocate who appeared for the prisoner would no doubt elicit the circumstances.

The deceased, who was a medical man, had accepted an appointment at Barbadoes. He had come to Beckhampton to wish his mother good-bye. He left her to sail by the steamer from Southampton, “and we shall prove to you,” says Mr. Dale, “that he never arrived at Barbadoes, not because we doubt the statement of the witness Vane, who saw him stretched senseless on the brink of the river, who, horror-stricken, watched his inanimate form for—as she will tell you—a considerable time, and saw no motion to denote a lingering spark of life, and in whose presence, unknown to him, the prisoner kicked it into the raging stream ; but in order to fill up the chain of evidence, as is our duty, and anticipate a

defence which might possibly be raised by my learned friend.

“ We shall also produce the unfortunate man’s luggage, which was sent on to Southampton, and there remained unclaimed till it was brought here for the purposes of this trial. My learned friend may say there has been no murder. Well, gentlemen, if he can explain away the threats, the finding of the hat, and the life-preserver, and the disappearance of Mr. Wybert—I frankly admit that you would not be right in convicting the prisoner upon what would then be the unsupported evidence of Miss Vane. But if he is not able to do so, you must ask yourselves, as reasonable men, what is the reasonable inference to be drawn from the circumstantial evidence in the light of the direct proof; and from the direct proof

supported, as we contend it is, by the circumstantial evidence?"

Then he subsided solemnly into his seat, and Mr. Wiggins called Charles Jackson, late groom and coachman to the deceased, who recounts the circumstances leading up to that *mauvais quart d'heure* passed in the surgery; also that when he drove back after taking a turn for ten minutes as ordered, he saw (through the window) the prisoner push his master back into his chair in an angry way, and then stand by the door threatening him. In cross-examination he admits he did not mention this to any one at the time, or think much about it till he heard Mr. Ellicott was in custody.

The next witness is Mrs. Wybert, who appears in the deepest mourning. She proves the threat made use of by the

prisoner on the morning of the 27th June :

*"Then, damn it all! look out for yourself, for if I get a chance I'll smash you."*

"Were those his very words?"

"They were."

Did she hear any more of their conversation?

She did not.

She then identifies the hat found by Job Benson in the flood the day that Pryor drove to the Mill by Stone Lane. She is quite sure it is that which her son wore on the day in question.

Why?

In the first place by its general appearance, and in the second place because she had herself sewn a string to it, at his request, to prevent it being blown off at sea.

That string had been cut off, but the end where it was sewn remained. She can swear to her sewing.

"I will not dispute that you have got Mr. Wybert's *hat*," says Serjeant Callendar, as he rises to cross-examine the witness. "You had a conversation with your son, I suppose, Mrs. Wybert, about what you call the threat?"

"I had."

"The 27th of June was the prisoner's birthday?"

"I am told it was."

"The day on which he was to come into his property?"

"I believe so."

"And he celebrated it by giving a dinner-party to several old friends. Is that so?"

"Yes."



"Did he invite your son to join them?"

"He did. It was an impertinence, after the manner he had treated him; and he refused."

"Ah! Then am I to understand that your son was very angry with Mr. Elliott?"

"He had been grossly insulted by him."

"But that was before he asked him to dinner, eh?"

"It was."

"And that gross insult so rankled in his mind, that he refused to make friends again."

"They were never *friends*."

"Well, then, to make up the quarrel?"

"He was not nearly as angry as he

ought to have been. He bore it very tamely, I thought."

"Still he refused to make it up?"

"To make it up! He was not a child. He was a good Christian, sir. He could forget and forgive; but that was no reason why he should go roystering in a public-house with a man who had treated him like a dog."

"Oh! Were the Rector of this town and Mr. May of the Bank present, amongst others, at this 'roystering,' Mrs. Wybert?"

"I believe they were."

"And the public-house was the Rose and Crown Hotel, was it not?"

"Yes."

"Now, having called such an entertainment, given at such a place, and to such guests, 'roystering in a public-house,' I

dare say the jury would like to know in what sort of a tone the prisoner spoke those words you call a threat."

"In an angry tone."

"Not roystering?"

"No, sir."

Now it so happened that the landlord of the Rose and Crown was on the jury, and Serjeant Callendar caught his eye at the word "roystering."

The finder of the hat next appears; swears to the pulling off of the string mentioned by the last witness, and also to a dint in the brim on the left-hand side. This, he is sure, was on it when found, for he got his missus to try and iron it out, and she did make it much better. It was quite doubled up like, at first.

"Well, it was full of water when you found it, wasn't it?" asked the Serjeant.

- "It was so," said the man.

"And you took it up by the brim, I'll be bound?"

"Mayhap I did."

"It had been a night and a day on the water, and yet your missus ironed it up quite smart. What an excellent hat it must have been!"

A titter runs round the court at this apparent demolition of the blow on the brim theory; but the triumph is short-lived.

The maker of the hat is sworn, and deposes that the damage to the brim must have been done when it was dry. It was not a tear. Taking up a wet hat full of water would not produce it. Moreover, the silk binding of the edge was frayed, as though by a blow. He also proves by his books that this hat was bought by Mr. Wybert on the 25th of June.

Then followed a wrangle about this witness not being on the depositions, cut short by a dry remark from the Judge that he supposed there was a hatter in Beckhampton whom the defence could call, if they wanted to contradict his evidence.

You could hear a pin drop in the crowded court when Kate Vane is called, and Dale Q.C. rises to examine her.

He is too old a hand to let the scene at the old Hall with its housekeeper be brought out in cross-examination. He bells that cat in his usual delicately-handed way.

She had been hustled, half unconscious, into a cab, and taken into the prisoner's house against her will when unstrung by parting with her nearest and dearest kin.

The excitement thus caused had quite

subsided before eleven o'clock. She describes the exact spot where she stood upon the bridge; the exact spot where the blow was struck—just at the foot of the three willows—and the body kicked into the stream; and as she adds nothing to her statement before the magistrates there is no need to repeat it here.

Her evidence is given with the utmost clearness and deliberation, and a hum of applause goes round when she gives her modest account of how she saved the Mill-house.

It is only when asked why she did not raise an alarm at the time, or denounce the crime immediately afterwards, that she bursts out with a passionate—

“I could not, I dared not; it was too horrible.”

“He’s made her cry, confound him!”

mutters the Serjeant, *sotto voce*, as he blots his notes, and rises to cross-examine.

"Pray compose yourself, Miss Vane," he says. "I have only a few questions to ask. Why did you not go straight home when you ran away from the old Hall?"

"I did not know what to do."

"Did the idea that they wanted to keep you there against your will continue to trouble you?"

"Perhaps it did."

"Quite so; and I suppose that the sight of Mr. Ellicott at such a late hour, and you quite alone, frightened you a little?"

"I was not frightened."

"Well, I will say agitated you."

"Yes; I was somewhat agitated."

"Naturally—although, I believe, you will admit now that his intentions towards you were honourable and kind?"

"I dare say he meant well."

"My learned friend has not asked you what sort of a night it was. It was dark and stormy, was it not?"

"Yes, sir; but the moon was full and bright between the clouds."

"Never mind about the moon. It was the night of the great flood?"

"Yes, sir."

"And the spot of which you speak—how far is that from where you stood on the bridge?"

"I should say about four hundred yards."

"Indeed! so far as that? Now, did you lose sight of Mr. Wybert and the prisoner when they passed you?"

"Yes — as they went down the steps."

"But afterwards?"



"I have said all that was done afterwards."

"Excuse me. My question is, did you ever lose sight of them?"

"I lost sight of Mr. Wybert when he was kicked into the river, and of the prisoner when he ran towards the station."

The Serjeant paused, and the Judge paused, and the jury began to whisper. "He's not going to make much out of her," is the opinion of the juniors in the back row.

"Were they close together all the time?" asked Callendar.

"They were; until the prisoner went in front."

"Now I want you to be particularly careful, Miss Vane. It was a dark night, you know, and four hundred yards off.

Was it not because Mr. Wybert began to walk slower, and not because the prisoner walked faster, that they separated?"

"No, sir."

"You saw no quarrel?"

"No, sir—not till the blow was struck."

"They walked together quite peaceably?"

"Yes, sir."

"That will do, Miss Vane," said Callendar pleasantly. He was always pleasant with a witness whom he could not break down.

"I have nothing further to ask you," said Dale Q.C.

Then the long-suppressed buzz broke out. The direct evidence had not been damaged one tittle!

The prisoner wrote something on a slip of paper and handed it to his leading

counsel. He wrote something in reply, and handed it back.

The first note ran : "*Pray ask her point blank if Wybert did not strike me first?*"

The answer was : "She would say '*No,*' and it *would hang you.* Tear this up."

Next came the policeman who had arrested the prisoner at Dale Terrace, under the assumed name of Wybert.

"Is not this a little out of order?" remarked the Judge.

"It is, my lord," replied Dale Q.C. ; "but unfortunately there has been an accident on the railway near Laremouth ; no lives have been lost, but I understand from this telegram which I hold in my hand, that the line is completely blocked. The witnesses whom we would like to call are thus delayed."

"When will they be here?"

"I expect to be informed every moment, my lord."

"Go on," said the Judge; and the policeman gives his evidence, commencing with the inevitable "From information I received."

In answer to Serjeant Callendar, he says he is a Beckhampton man—that he remembers the flood—that he was employed by the Relief Committee to investigate claims for drowned cattle—that no compensation was paid unless the carcass was found—that hundreds of people were out searching, far and near, for carcasses, as soon as the water went down—that no human remains were found.

"Is there any other witness you can go on with?" asks the Judge.

"Yes, my lord," replies Mr. Dale

solemnly, "the gentleman from Barbadoes."

"The gentleman from Barbadoes" produces a letter from Mr. Wybert, stating that he should sail to take up his appointment on the 23th June, 1875 ; and states that he had not arrived up to the 3rd August, 1876, when he, the gentleman, left to give evidence in this case. Here it comes to a stand still. There are fourteen coal-waggon, more or less smashed up, and two engines, sprawling over the line seven miles from Ramsden Junction. The Laremouth witnesses cannot possibly be at hand till five o'clock ; and the Judge has to entertain the Grand Jury at dinner at six.

The trial is adjourned to next day.

"Got a last year's almanack !" says

Serjeant Callendar to his junior, as they meet in the robing room. When it is consulted they find that the moon on the 27th June, 1875, was pretty nearly at the same point as it will be on the 23rd August, 1876.

“We’ll go to the bridge to-night at eleven o’clock,” says Sam’s leader, “and judge for ourselves if that girl could see.”

At the hour fixed they go together. Sam is sent down the path to the spot so clearly described by Kate Vane, and goes through the form of striking an imaginary foe, and kicking his body into where the river had been. The moon is over the town, and its beams strike full on that place—full and clear without even a shadow to deceive the view.

Sam returns to his leader, who is leaning

over the parapet, just as Kate Vane might have leaned that night :

"She *could* see," he says gloomily, "for I can. Look at the willow trees ! every leaf stands out clear. The girl has told the truth."


Sam looks at the willows, and his reply is almost a shriek.

"*She lied, Serjeant ! she lied ! and we can prove it.*"



## CHAPTER VIII.

THE JURY HAVE AGREED.

ARLY-RISING Beckhampton finds fifty workmen busy as bees on the spot so accurately pictured by Kate Vane in her evidence. There has been much digging, and measuring, and planning; and already one tall scaffold-pole raises its point to the skies. Its twin brother is being prised up, not far off, to the perpendicular, and will be in position before the court is opened.



The court is not so crowded as on the previous day. The interest is at an end with Kate Vane's evidence, and many old stagers at the bar declare that the case "is all over—bar the sentence."

The Laremouth detachment of witnesses—Mason, the boy Peter Brown, the tall barman, and Mr. Probert the sexton—arrive. Mr. Marston is to the fore; and after another ineffectual attempt to shut them out, the elopement, pretended death of Madge, and her secret marriage to the prisoner, are proved.

Serjeant Callendar intimates that he will call witnesses, and opens for the defence. After the usual exordium he goes on to say :

"This, gentlemen, is a murder case *without a body*, without one bone of a body, to show that a murder has been

committed ! Be good enough to have this fact constantly in your minds. This is a murder case founded upon the direct evidence of one uncorroborated witness, and a lot of what my learned friend calls circumstantial evidence. Without the former, this latter is just a row of zeros.

“Now for the first ought in the line. We have a hat. Yes, gentlemen ! the prosecution conducted by the Treasury, with the Bank of England at its back, and all the services of all the detectives and all the police of the kingdom at its command—has been so fortunate as to produce, a *hat* ! And a hatter. Don't let us forget him. His name was in the hat, and they actually found him and brought him here all the way from London to tell you it has a bruise upon the brim.

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When you retire, gentlemen, do me the favour to examine your own hats, and if you find a bruise upon any of them, ask yourselves how you would like to have a fellow-creature accused of murder on such grounds as that. Why it is simply ridiculous! What is there to show that such a bruise may not have been caused by a false step getting into a cab—a fall in a railway carriage, or by any one of a score of other accidents to which travellers' hats are exposed—why nothing!

“Then we are told there was bad blood between my client and Mr. Wybert—my learned friend has invariably spoken of him as ‘the deceased.’ Where is the body? There was a quarrel; so vindictive, so awful a quarrel, gentlemen, that one of the parties to it asks the other to his birthday dinner! What is called a

threat is used by the prisoner when his peaceful advance is repulsed. He says, 'Then, damn it all, look out for yourself, for if I have a chance I'll smash you.' Observe the first word, '*Then*.' This must have had reference to something said by Mr. Wybert. Had he threatened? Language has no value if he had not. Leave out the word *then*, and it is a threat. Consider it as it has been sworn to, and it is the *answer* to a threat. Did Wybert do anything that night to call it into execution? If the witness Vane is to be believed—nothing. They walked side by side. There was no quarrel. The only words she heard spoken were these, 'But you shall.'

"Gentlemen, as reasonable men, you must judge what passed at night, by what happened in the morning. In the morn-



God to bless—he has dragged her name, I say, into the foul atmosphere of a criminal court. For what? To prove that this good woman married a man-slayer to conceal a murder!

“The man who stands there trembling between life and death was engaged to her openly, and married her in secret. Granted. And what then? We are here to try him for the wilful murder of Henry Lane Wybert—not for some folly or whim which made him shirk a formal marriage.

“Our law does not permit his wife to be called as a witness. Our law does not permit him to speak on oath in his own defence. Our law declares that he shall not be obliged to prove his innocence, or to account for any act which an astute prosecutor may take advantage of; but that his

guilt shall be proved against him beyond any reasonable doubt which shall occur to the mind of a reasonable man.

“So much for the circumstantial evidence. Well, you may say, gentlemen, this indeed constitutes a row of zeros ; but if an integer in the shape of a fact be placed before them, they make a sum. This integer, you may say, is the evidence of the witness, Kate Vane.

“I am coming to that, and I beg you will recall it to your minds. Was it the evidence of a rational woman ? Consider her conduct. She refuses to accompany her best friends to Australia, where a happy home awaited her. She refuses an excellent offer of service in this country, and flies from the prisoner’s house as though it were a dungeon of the Inquisition.

“Then she remains at the Mill when it was threatened by the floods, declines assistance when it is offered, and disappears, to bring this fearful charge against my client, months and months after the supposed fact. Is this the behaviour of a rational being? Gentlemen, I might rest my case here, but I will not.

“Last night a discovery was made which reflects the highest credit upon my learned friend who sits behind me—your townsman, Mr. Samuel Pryor. We visited the scene of this supposed murder which has no body, together, and the result is that we shall prove, beyond the possibility of a doubt, that Miss Vane is under the influence of delusions.

*“The wall of Dr. Byng’s Fives Court was standing on the night of the 27th June, 1875, and interposed a solid structure*



*three bricks thick between this unfortunate girl and the spot she pretends to have seen!*

“We have in court the builder of that wall. He will produce the original plans. We have had two poles erected, one on each corner of where it stood, and we shall call five hundred witnesses, if necessary, to prove that the willow trees—at the foot of which she pretends the blow was struck—were not visible from the bridge when that wall was up! and it did not fall until five o’clock in the afternoon of the 28th! This utterly demolishes the direct evidence, and the circumstantial falls of itself.”

Then the learned and eloquent Serjeant launched out into a denunciation of the prosecution, which had imagined a murder without a body, out of the evidence of a lunatic.

He sits down elated and defiant. Sam calls the builder and proves the wall. They have up ten witnesses, who swear that the willows can not be seen from where Kate stood on the bridge, except through the span between the poles which represented the fallen wall ; but Mr. Dale, in his quiet, plodding way, is equal to the occasion.

He gets out, on cross-examination, that though the wall did shut out the willows, fifteen feet of them on one side, and thirty on the other, would have been actually visible from the bridge, and he proposes to recall Kate Vane.

Here comes another wrangle. She had heard the evidence for the defence. She had not been cross-examined on this point !

The Judge cuts this short again by

saying he would recall her himself, and he does.

She says that the wall was intact that night, but that she had many times stood on the bridge, and thought over what had passed, after it had fallen. The view by day, and the wall gone, was so different from what it was that night.

Perhaps involuntarily she had shaped her recollection by the day view. She was quite certain as to what had passed—where it passed might have been fifteen feet on one side or thirty feet the other. She had told the truth, all but the place where it happened.

Serjeant Callendar, with a gesture of disdain, declined to put any question. Then he summed up his evidence more defiantly than ever, and at the end of almost every well-poised phrase comes in

tones, now sarcastic, now indignant, now reproachful—" *Where is the body ?*"

Dale Q.C. rises, and solemnly goes over again all he has said before. It had come to this. The principal witness for the prosecution had made a mistake of fifteen feet, of less than the distance between him—the learned Q.C.—and the jury! She had candidly admitted she was mistaken as to places, not as to facts.

They (the jury) were not trying where the prisoner had murdered the deceased, but the fact—ay or no—had he murdered him? The exact spot was immaterial. His learned friend had asked, over and over again, " *Where is the body ?*"

The search upon which he placed so much importance had been made only for beasts. It was superficial and trivial, in

comparison with what would have been gone through if human relics had been its object. Cattle and other beasts had been overtaken in the meadows by the rising waters, and there drowned amongst hedge-rows and fences, by which their carcasses were held.

The human body—if they (the jury) believed Kate Vane—had been flung senseless into the river itself, where it was deep and strong ; into the heart of the current, which had carried everything before it down to the sea.

At the time when search was made, there was no suspicion of foul play. Later, it was idle to seek. “Where is the body?” says the great advocate (now thoroughly in earnest, for he believes in the justice of his case), with lowered voice, and tremulous forefinger raised— “God only knows !

But if you ask me where is its *shadow*, I say it is to be found in the flight of the prisoner, in his elopement, in his hiding under a false name, ay! even in the defence which has been made in his name this day."

The Judge sums up very carefully, very fairly, only that he takes an advocate's view of Kate Vane's evidence, which he evidently does not think has been shaken.

"The first thing," he says, "for you (the jury) to consider, is this. Has a murder been committed? No body has been found, and you must conclude no body *can* be found. The law does not require that the dead body of the person slain must be found in order to constitute the crime of murder. Suppose, for example, a man throws another overboard from a ship

in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, or drops him into a lime-kiln. It might be impossible to produce a dead body in either case ; and yet the facts, if proved, would amount to murder. You have no such extreme case before you, but the principle by which you will be guided is the same. Do you believe that the prisoner at the bar wilfully and with malice stunned Henry Lane Wybert, and then threw his body into the river Beck ? If you do, you will have to consider further, did death result from the blow, or from immersion in the water, or from both causes combined ? The learned counsel for the prisoner has told you that it is the duty of the prosecution to prove affirmatively that Wybert is dead, and this is so. Supposing you believe the evidence of Kate Vane, you have to ask yourselves, is it clear beyond the possibility of a doubt

that a man who has been struck senseless and flung into a river at midnight is dead? In this connection you will consider what has been given in evidence as to the force of the blow, and the strength of the flood. The prisoner is a powerful man, and the flood was an unusually high one. It carried away solid edifices, it swept down brick walls, it drowned strong animals which were conscious of their peril, and struggled against it in vain. How did it deal with a stunned man? His body has not been found in the valley affected by the flood—that is a fact bearing one way. It has not arrived at Barbadoes, whither the living man was bound—that is a fact bearing another way. And neither would be conclusive. He may be dead, and the body not discovered—he may be alive, but not at Barbadoes.”



His lordship then proceeded to analyse the evidence upon which these conclusions were to be formed. And first as to Kate Vane. The jury had heard her evidence, and the explanation which she had given of what is certainly a very grave discrepancy. Is it a reasonable explanation, or is she labouring altogether under delusions? The important question is, Did she actually see what she swears she saw? not where she saw it. If they (the jury) believe she is labouring under a delusion; then there is an end of the case. To do this, however, they must take all her conduct into consideration, especially her cutting of the Mill dam, an act of considerable courage and forethought, and which showed that she had her wits about her, at any rate, when she did it. They should also consider the behaviour of the

prisoner after he left Beckhampton, in connection with, and not independent of, the direct evidence and other points of the circumstantial, and take the case as a whole.

Then he reads over all the testimony, word for word, and it sounds very ugly.

The charge is finished at half-past three. The jury retire.

"It's one of those cases which get worse the more you think about it," says an old hand in the Crown Court. "If they come back in twenty minutes, he has a chance. If they stop away an hour, it's all over with him."

They stop away one, two, three hours.

At half-past six they come in to put a question. The Judge is sent for and answers it.

No. Mr. Marston cannot be asked if his daughter gave him any reason for running away that night with the prisoner. In the first place, it would be hearsay ; and in the next, an indirect way of getting a wife's evidence for or against her husband, which the law did not permit.

This is evidently a great disappointment to those dozen "good men." They go back to their consulting-room, looking fagged and disgusted. If they agree before eleven o'clock the Judge is to be sent for again, if not they must pass another night in the Court-house.

The old Hall is nearly six miles out of town. Pryor's house is only just the other side of the river, next to Dr. Byng's. During the day a block and halliards have been fixed to the top of one of the

tall scaffold-poles by Beck-side, and three flags are in readiness—red, white, black.

The top of that pole can be seen from the upper windows of the Hall, where Madge watches and prays. As dusk comes on a stand is brought out into the middle of Pryor's lawn, and three rockets placed ready. One will burst red, one white, the third will go up into the darkness and fall without a sign.

The clock is striking ten; Madge is still at her watch, with throbbing eyeballs fixed upon the spot where the signal agreed upon will appear. Up goes the fiery streak! and a cluster of crimson balls is scattered to the night.

*The Jury have agreed!*

At the Court, where a few dim lamps cast ghastly shadows and give barely

light enough to read, their names are being called over, oh so slowly ! In the home that the word first upon the foreman's lip may desolate, the prisoner's wife kneels in an agony of supplication. Up tears the second rocket !—slackens, bends, stops, and gracefully curls downwards to its fall. Will it never burst ! Yes, there it goes ! *Silver stars*—the white signal for “Not GUILTY”—burst out and glitter, and fade away in the darkness.



## CHAPTER IX.

FOLLOW THE HEN BIRD.



HE only spectators present when the verdict of "Not guilty" was given, were Sam Pryor—who kept faithful vigil, lest the jury might come in with another question, and give him the chance to get in a word in his friend and client's favour—his boy, Mrs. Wybert, and Kate Vane.

We can guess what Sam did. The moment the jury appeared away went his

boy, and the first rocket was fired. The moment the momentous question, "Do you find the prisoner guilty or not guilty?" was answered, away went Sam, and up rose the silver stars.

The two women walked home in silence. Twice the elder stopped, and essayed to speak, but she could not. When they reached the cottage gate, and Kate was about to pass in, the widow thrust her back with a husky "*No*," and stood facing her, and trembling with rage.

"No. You shall not darken my doors again," she hissed.

"For to-night, Mrs. Wybert—it is late."

"Never again. You fool! you have spoiled everything. You liar! you have let him escape."

"I spoke the truth."

"The truth! You who have passed that wall a thousand times! This comes of your solitary walks, your dreamings, your sly, silent ways. No, I believe you meant it. I believe you wanted to save him. Say—are you an idiot or an impostor?"

"I am neither, Mrs. Wybert. As truly as there is a God in heaven the man who was just tried felled your son to the earth that night, and threw his body into the Beck."

"And you have let him off! The more shame — oh, a thousand times the more shame upon you—viper! Go!"

"Where can I go?" Kate pleaded.

"I don't know, I don't care, so that it is out of my sight! Go!"

"You will be sorry for this, Mrs. Wybert," retorted Kate, with eyes which began to



flash. "I can make you repent it, and I *will*!"

"Do what you please. Go where you like, and I will send your things after you. But quit my house, and take your hateful, false face from my sight. Do you hear me? Go!"

"Then you brave me!"

"Yes. Do your worst. What can you do to harm me? My son is dead; his murderer has escaped. My bitter cup of affliction is full; but you shall not see it overflow. Be-gone!"

"You believe that Fraser Ellicott is guilty?"

"As Cain."

"I heard in Court that even if he were acquitted he would never be able to hold up his head again."

"I am glad of that—no thanks to you, though."

"It is in my power to reinstate him fully. Four words from me would do it, *and it shall be done!*"

"Then you have committed perjury."

"Oh dear no. If any doubt the truth of my evidence, what I shall say will reinstate me also ; but your vindictiveness will come out in its true colours."

"Tell me what you mean, and you shall stay here to-night."

The widow's anger was giving way to curiosity.

"No, madam," said Kate. "I shall go to London by the 12.10 train. I will send a porter for my property. Good-night, Mrs. Wybert, and pleasant dreams;"

and with a low, mocking curtsy, she left.

“Nicked it by the skin of his teeth !” is the verdict of that larger jury who try Fraser Ellicott when the morning journals are out.

Later on, the ultra-newspaper news, composed in smoking-rooms and five o'clock teas, passes current.

“They say that his wife got round the jury ; played Lady Bountiful, you know ; stuffed the brats with lollypops, and that sort of thing.”

“Devilish well-handled case ! Smart dodge that of Marston’s !”

“Old Starling made so sure of a hang-

ing, that he had his black cap in the desk."

"Sold the Hall, and gone to live at Florence."

Fraser does not hear these comments, but he feels that something of the sort is said. He is woefully depressed, and very bitter against the law, which has refused to take his life, but sacrificed his honour.

"I have ridden off upon a falsehood," he sighs, "and the truth was shut out."

He has many staunch friends, who stick up for him right and left, but ordinary acquaintances are shy; there is no doubt about that. Some because they don't know what to say to him if they speak; others because they don't know what Mrs.

Grundy will say of them for speaking at all.

The old Hall is not sold, and the Ellicotts do not go to live at Florence. Madge, brave enough now, is going to fight it out on the old line as soon as Fraser gets strong.

Uncle Joe does good service in town, and is surprised to find what a powerful ally he has in the person of the Hon. Mrs. Bletchingly, who is no longer a "creature" since Lady St. Louis drove her round the Park. For this metamorphosis she is gushingly grateful to Uncle Joe. She would do anything to serve the dear man ; but she has a secret from him—not a ghost this time.

Still, there is a good deal of cold-shouldering, and Fraser Ellicott does not get strong.

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"I am going to have that girl's things sold this afternoon, my dear," says Mr. Pryor to the wife of his bosom; "so if you have a fancy for the bureau I spoke to you about, you had better come down to Smith's and bid for it. She told me to take it at my own price, but I prefer to have an auction."

So Mrs. Pryor goes down to Smith's, and becomes the purchaser of the article in question. It is a heavy, old-fashioned article, but quaint and serviceable. None of your vamped-up affairs, in which, if you take out one drawer, you can get at the one beneath. Every drawer had its casing, and the well-seasoned wood ran in and out as easily as a piston—all but one drawer; that stuck.

There was something in the groove,

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evidently; sent there, no doubt, when the bureau was turned upside-down in the cart. After a good deal of coaxing and shaking, they got that "something" out, and it is a very dirty shirt-collar.

"One of old Hazeltine's," Pryor hazards, throwing it aside.

But his wife, woman-like, is not so easily satisfied about a man's collar found in a girl's drawer.

"Old Hazeltine never wore one that shape," she says, picking it up. "And see! this isn't dirt. I do believe it's blood!"

Blood it was! Whose blood?

Inside the band, where it was comparatively clean, they find, in marking-ink, "H. L. W. 12—75."

Pryor is fairly staggered.

"Don't speak to me," he gasps. "Don't

say a word. Let me think this over. 'H. L. W.'—Henry Lane Wybert. That bureau was made over to Vane when the Hazeltines left. '*Twelve, seventy-five*'—that must mean one dozen bought, or at least marked, last year. Wybert was not here last year before June. Blood on it! Mother, mother, why didn't we find this out three weeks ago!"

"Why, what does it mean?"

"Give me time. His collar in her drawer, and blood on it! Half the story told truly at the trial! Wouldn't leave the Mill! By the living Jingo, I have it! She fished him out of the water. He told her as much as suited him. Took her to the bridge, perhaps, and acted it over; only he forgot about the wall. It must be so. There's no other explanation. Don't look so astonished, mother. If that



collar be Wybert's, the blackguard is alive!"

"Impossible!"

"Can't be otherwise, my dear. I'll bet fifty thousand pounds against yon rag that he wore it on the night of the 27th June last year. She wouldn't have taken it off his *dead* body. She fished him out of the Beck. She had him at the Mill nursing him the day I went to help her away. They left together when the water went down. I see it all! And to be revenged upon Ellicott, he got her to charge him with his murder! Please go and find Sam." (The "long" was on now, and Sam at home.) "He's a smart boy. If it hadn't been for Sam, there would have been a hanging about this time. And, my dear, go to Smith's, find out who bought the other furniture, and ask them to let

you look if there is anything else. Don't let the smallest bit of rubbish escape you ; and if you find anything, leave it where it is till Sam and I come."

Thus Pryor, in such a high state of agitation, talking so fast and gesticulating so wildly, that his wife is unable to follow him, but feels there must be something very grave in the discovery, and hurries off after Sam.

Later on a messenger is sent to the Hall with a note for Sir Joseph Balderson. Could he come to Mr. Pryor's house on a matter of some importance, without saying anything to Mr. and Mrs. Ellicott ? Uncle Joe answers in person, and soon afterwards accompanies Pryor and Sam to the county jail. (Oh, Sam is smart!) Everything turns upon whether that collar belonged to Wybert. How could that be proved ?

“Why by comparison with what might be in his luggage, which was produced at the trial,” says Sam; “and that’s at the jail with other criminal waifs and strays.”

No difficulty is made about showing that luggage, and in a neat round box (Mr. Wybert was precise and natty in his ways) they find eleven new collars, own brothers of that which has blood on it, and all are marked in precisely the same hand, “H. L. W. 12—75.”

Is Fraser Ellicott to be told? Better not. The news might brighten him up, but if nothing came of it he would fall into a worse state of despondency than ever. Should they trust Madge? Sam says yes. Pryor thinks yes. Uncle Joe shakes his head.

“She’ll let it out. It would come out of her eyes, and the touch of her hand;

though she never said a word. Let us three work it out, and if there be a disappointment they won't feel it."

The words of Uncle Joe are held to be the words of wisdom. Work it out! When? No time like the present. How? By finding Kate Vane. Good; but where begin the search? That is not so easily answered. She had fallen out with Mrs. Wybert and gone to London on the night of the trial, and London is a big place. Should they take the police into their counsels? Not yet. But a private detective might be employed. A thought strikes Mr. Pryor. Gentlemanly Mr. Edwards is the very man, and reference to the evidence at the trial will give his address.

"You are quite right," says that person when Sam and Uncle Joe (who has

suddenly heard of important business in London) seek him next day. "It is a standing maxim with us to follow the hen bird."

Serjeant Callendar has betaken himself to the Continent, and flourishes at Baden and Vichy in radiant costume, affecting the company of gilded youth, and sinking the lawyer five fathom five. So he is no help. Bell and the brats are in Italy, where her sixpenceless man is boring a big tunnel. The Honourable Mr. and Mrs. Bletchingly will soon start upon their autumnal tour, which is delayed a little this year by the indisposition of the lady. The Rev. Mr. Marston is recommended change of air by his new bishop, who fears that the climate of Beckhampton (during the assizes) may have disagreed with him; and has gone to Jersey. "Brown's" is

closed for cleaning, and Uncle Joe wanders about disconsolate, in what appears to him a new metropolis, and a dull one.

Madge goes on as before, not playing Lady Bountiful and stuffing brats with lollypops, but doing good work well—fighting it out with high and low, and smiling under many a wound. She is very sorry when Uncle Joe is obliged to leave on that “important business” (in which she doesn’t believe).

“Dear Uncle Joe,” she says with a hand on either shoulder as he stands in the hall waiting for the dog-cart, “I know we bore you horribly, and it’s so good of you to come at all.”

“Book me for Christmas, Madge,” he replies cheerily ; “and a merry one.”

It was a standing maxim with gentle-

manly Mr. Edwards, to "follow the hen bird." Let us do so ; going back to the night of the verdict when Kate Vane so aroused the curiosity of Mrs. Wybert. It was nearly daylight when she stopped her cab at the corner of a mean street near Blackheath, and walked to one of the houses where a man was sitting up for her. His name was Lane. He wore a thick black beard, and had a pinched unnatural expression on the upper part of his face such as Henry Wybert's might have had, if seen in a bad looking-glass. She tells him that Fraser Ellicott is acquitted, and he bursts into a furious rage.

"It is not my fault, Henry," says the girl. "I said exactly what we arranged, God forgive me!"

"Ah! you go back now, do you?" he snarls.

"No. If I were *sure* he tried to kill you I—Henry, did you tell me all that passed?"

"Why?"

"Because when they asked me if I had told all, and I said I had, he turned round in the dock and gave me *such* a look! I shall never forget it—never! Are you sure you had no quarrel."

"None till the blow was struck." He did not say which blow. She knows only of one, and is satisfied.

"Are you not sorry now," she asks, after having told him every detail of the trial, "that you were not content with having him tried for attempting to kill you?"

"No," he replies dryly. "I am contented as it is. You wouldn't agree to leave the fellow to be hanged, and letting



him off at the last would have re-established his character. As it is, half the world will think him guilty. He'll never stand upright again. It is just as well as it is. Leave my plans alone, will you! And look here, you go to bed, Kate. You look wearied out."

"I am very weary," she sighs, "but there is something I must say at once. You spoke of your plans, what are they?"

"That is my business," is his sulky reply.

"I have done my part of our bargain, Henry, and now you must do yours. When can we be married, dear?"

"Tush! we are very well as we are," he replies.

"We should never have been as we are, but for your solemn vow to marry me if I

helped you to be revenged on Fraser Elliott. I have done so. You admit that you are contented as it is. Do me justice, dear. Think what an awful sin I have committed to please you, and do me justice."

"Well, well ; there's no hurry," he says peevishly.

"There is. This case has taught me something. *You are not safe until we are married.*"

"That is a threat, Kate."

"No, only a warning ; suppose it were to leak out somehow that you were alive, and I was obliged to say who took me to the bridge, and pointed out the spot, and told me to swear what happened there as though I had seen it ?"

"People have disbelieved you once, my dear, and they might again," sneers Mr. Wybert.

"Not with you alive to corroborate me. There would be no '*Where is the body?*' next time. You are not the man you were before you received that blow, Henry. Be guided by me who love you. Let us be married as quickly as we can, and then go abroad. Why not go to America? Have we money enough?"

"I don't know; how much have you?"

"Four pounds ten," she replies, producing her purse, "out of the ten you gave me."

"About enough to buy the licence," he laughs. "Go to bed, child, and we'll talk it over after breakfast."

When Kate wakes it feels late. Wybert is not there, and she has no match.

She goes to the door and calls downstairs :

“ What o’clock is it ? ”

“ Half-past eleven,” is the reply bawled back.

“ Where is Mr. Lane ? ”


“ Gone out.”

It is good to follow the hen bird ; but suppose she is deserted by the “ wanted ” mate ? Kate looks round the room. Not a scrap of anything belonging to her companion is visible. Even the four pounds ten which she had shown him in her purse are gone !



## CHAPTER X.

SO ENDS IT.

“EDICAL. — *Wanted, a Dispenser for a Colonial Infirmary ; one who can make himself useful in Hospital cases preferred. Liberal salary. No testimonials : personal examination. Apply by letter in the first instance, W. J., Medical and General Registry Office, Covent Garden.*”

The above advertisement is written in

Mr. Edwards' office, and appears in the *Times* and several other papers. At the third appearance seven hundred and fifty-nine answers are received; so there is no lack of dispensers willing to go to the colonies, and make themselves useful in hospital, for a liberal salary. W. J. must be hard to please, for the advertisement continues to appear, and applications in reply at the rate of a hundred and fifty a day roll in. It is hard work for Uncle Joe even to glance over them all. What has he to do with it? Well, he knows Mr. Wybert's writing, and Mr. Edwards doesn't; and this is a trap set to catch Mr. Henry Wybert.

At last he sniffs at the bait.

A letter arrives post-marked Chester, in which H. L. states that he is a qualified medical practitioner, but withholds his

name on account of pecuniary embarrassments. He will take that Dispensership on condition that no questions are asked except as to capabilities.

"Our man's writing," cries Uncle Joe, "and just his way—dictating terms—confound his insolence!"

Then they concoct the answer, which requires much craft. It won't do to snap at his offer, or to snub it. He is informed by return of post that his conditions are very unusual, that the advertiser can hardly be indifferent to the moral character of his employés, but if satisfied that H. L. is merely unfortunate, and otherwise fully competent, he (the advertiser) might not be unwilling to engage him. A day and hour is fixed for a personal and private interview at Liverpool, for (says Mr. Edwards) that is

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handy for him, and he might be shy of London.

Uncle Joe hears that the Bletchinglys, instead of going to the Continent, have made up their mind (*i.e.* madame's) to break new ground, and winter in the United States. So he calls to wish them good-bye.

He is shown up to the wonderful drawing-rooms, and there, seated on an amber satin lounge, and dressed *à ravir*, is seated a golden-headed girl, who rises as soon as he is announced, and hastily retreats.

Mrs. Bletchingly comes in a minute or two afterwards, very much flurried.

"Did you see her?" she asks, before even a "How-d'ye-do?"

"A young lady ran away when I



was announced, but I was not so fortunate as to see her face," Uncle Joe replied.

"Look here, Sir Joseph," says the lady, "I hate to do anything that would seem like going against you, after your great kindness, but blood is stronger than water. That was my sister."

"Indeed! I did not know you had one."

"Honour?" asks the lady, with raised forefinger.

"I am not one of those who expect too much of Providence," replies the old beau, with a gallant smile.

"Then it's all right," says Mrs. Bletchingly, with a sigh, quite out of tune with the compliment. "She will go with us to America, and—who knows?—perhaps stay there. I will tell you all about it

some day. She has not been happy, poor girl. She came to me a week ago, starving. What could I do?"

"What you did do was all that is kind and generous, I am sure," Uncle Joe replies. "If the past be painful, and the future bright, let us stick to the latter. When do you start?"

"On Wednesday."

"So soon? I have to go to Liverpool to-morrow. I may perhaps have the pleasure of seeing you off."

"The steamer sails on Thursday morning."

"Does your sister accompany you?"

"Of course. She jumped at the idea of going to America."

"Take care she is not stolen from you there," says Uncle Joe gaily. "Pretty English girls are at a premium."

"I would like to see her happily married," replies Mrs. Bletchingly. "I feel sure she must be truthful, and yet I hate to say so to you."

"Why? What can I have to do with it? I'm out of the market," laughs the Baronet.

The subject is changed, and Uncle Joe takes his leave, thinking as much about the Jabberwock as of Kate Vane; but with a little nudge of curiosity to know what the golden-haired girl, who flew like a sky-rocket in blue barège out of the back room, is like.

W. J. (extended to Dr. Wilson Jainey) goes to Liverpool, accompanied by Sir Joseph, and they take up their quarters at Radley's, where H. L. (extended to Henry Lane) can find him at any time from one o'clock till three.

It is concluded that H. L. will come over from Chester just in time for the interview; but all places are the same to him now, and he starts the day before, almost immediately after receipt of W. J.'s letter. He finds it hard work killing time. Amongst other devices for its taking off, he borrows a Medical Directory, and looks out for Dr. Wilson Jainey.

Perhaps it will say to what colony he belongs. There is no such name in the list.

This raises a suspicion.

He strolls into the yard of the Lime Street Station to think it over, and sees the London train come in.

"A trap, by God!" he gasps, when Sir Joseph Balderson and Mr. Edwards emerge from a first-class carriage.

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He catches, by his ragged sleeve, a newspaper boy who is passing, and says :

“D’ye want to earn a shilling ?”

“Rather.”

“Follow that cab, then ; see if it goes to Radley’s. If it does, find out the names of the two gentlemen.”

“Shilling each then,” bids the boy.

“Half-a-crown if you’re back in twenty minutes,” is the offer, taken and earned.

Mr. Lane starts back to Chester by the next train, *with a return ticket*.

The trap set in sight of the bird remains open from one till three, but no bird is caught. About nine o’clock the following telegram from Chester is to hand :

"To Dr. Jainey,

"Radley's Hotel, Liverpool.

*"Application withdrawn. Circumstances improved.*

"HENRY LANE."

"Is it any use hunting for him at Chester?" asks Uncle Joe, who looks very chapfallen.

"Oh, I think so; but I need not trouble you to come, sir," says Mr. Edwards, "till you're wanted. It's a dull old place. Better stop here, and I'll telegraph if I get a clue."

So Uncle Joe can wish the Bletchinglys good-bye. He is too old a traveller to bother them at their hotel. He finds out that they are going by the White Star boat, which is to sail at twelve, and whose passengers are ordered, in the most

peremptory manner, to be on board the tender, at St. George's Landing-Stage, at half-past eleven.

The passengers by the Inman boat, which sails at the last-mentioned time, have in like manner been summoned to its tender half an hour in advance, under penalty of losing their passage. But punctuality is not the order of the day with the steamers, for there, as Uncle Joe strolls down to the landing-stage, at five and twenty minutes past eleven—there is the Inman tender just throwing off her lines.

The bell rings. "Any more for the shore?" is shouted. A hot rain from blown-off steam, flying hawsers, and cries of "By your leave!" scatter the lookers-on.

The gangway-plank is hauled in, and

the tide shakes the little steamer loose forward. She is just on the swing round, when a woman dashes through the crowd, hesitates for a moment on the verge of the landing-stage, and then—notwithstanding a dozen shouts of “Don’t try it!” “Come back!”—jumps for her!

And reaches! She lights on the very edge of the gangway, where the slightest touch of support would have given her back her balance. It comes not.

A man who stood near where she jumped, and might have saved her with one finger, starts back and runs below.

She remains for a moment vibrating, as it were, between safety and destruction; and then with a piercing cry she falls back into the swift deep water between the steamer and the stage, just as the paddles make their first turn.



They are stopped ; one of the floats has struck and caught her. Another half turn and she would have been mashed to pieces.

A boat is hailed, and the body carried to the Custom-House shed.

Then Uncle Joe knows what the golden-haired girl—Mrs. Bletchingly's sister—is like ; and he can guess who was the man she took that perilous leap to join. To join without a thought, except to be with him, to share his lot whatever it might be, to hope and pray for justice at his hands !

What did she know about tenders and Atlantic steamers ? She saw him going away in a ship, and the first bound of her heart carried her poor body to his side.

And he stretched not a hand to save her !

—the girl to whom he owed his life; and who loved him to the last.

Let us hope that he had not noticed her on the stage; that he did not see her spring; that his start back was the result of surprise.

It might have been, and yet he went his way; pretended not to know who the girl was, and made no inquiry as to what injury had happened to her.

He hopes she will either prove true to him, or die—the latter for choice.

Once he is at sea, she can say what she pleases; for conspiracy and subornation of perjury are not, he has found out, offences for which he can be extradited from America.

He does not know that the steamer will stop at Queenstown for the mails.

Kate Vane is conscious when they are

disengaging her mangled form from the paddle-wheel, into which the tide had hurried her to be beaten to death.

There is a cruel red tear right across her face ; her left arm hangs limp and crooked by her side.

Even if youth and health are strong enough to endure the shock, she will never stand upright again, for her spine is injured terribly. So say the doctors, when she is carried back to the hotel, and her dress cut off her.

Her first questions are, "Has he gone ? Will he not come back and see me ?"

"Oh Katie, Katie !" sobs her sister, "don't think of him. He is *such* a villain."

For Uncle Joe has told her all he knows, and the suspicions founded upon the collar discovered in her bureau.

"He tried to murder Fraser Ellicott, and now he has all but murdered you."

"Shall I die, Sadie?" Kate asks.

"You are in the hands of God, dear; but live or die, you have one plain duty before you. You must give up that man to justice."

"I will not. I am as guilty as he is. Let them punish me."

"Katie, will you see Sir Joseph Balder-son, and hear what he has to say?"

"Is he here?" asked the girl, with a shudder. "Have they found out?"

"Yes, a great deal; more, we think, than you know. We think that you saved Wybert that night."

"How else could he have been here alive? Yes, Sadie, I saved him."

Her pain-paled eyes brighten up as she speaks.

"And that he told you what to say at the trial, and made you pretend you had seen it yourself."

"Go on."

"He did not tell you a quarter of the truth. He attacked Fraser Ellicott first, and it was only in self-defence that he struck back. He was trying to lift up the body, when the bank gave way, and it fell into the river."

"Why didn't he say so?"

"The law would not let him."

"Oh, that look, that look! It haunts me now," Kate moaned.

"Is this all a frightful dream, Sadie?"

"No, my poor dear, a frightful reality. That cur has made you his tool throughout. Do you know why he so hated Mr. Ellicott? Because he wanted to marry Miss Marston himself."

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"That *must* be false."

"It is the truth. He did all he could to break off their engagement."

"I remember something. Did he not want me to write her? I forget, but it seems as if there was—— but I refused, and he left me angry. The next I saw of him was his body coming down on the flood, just as I cut the trench—and I saved him."

"He didn't put out a finger to save you."

"He was so startled, dear. He did not see me till I jumped."

"Katie, will you say what you have told me before a magistrate if we send for one?"

"No, I will not."

"Then he will escape."

"All the better. I love him, Sadie."

"Love him ! After all he has done ?"

"He has done more than you know of, and yet I love him. Should I have perjured my soul for a man I did not love ? I am *his*, soul and body ; and some day he will love me, when he knows I have been true to my guilty love."

"And so poor innocent Fraser Ellicott must be disgraced for ever."

"He was acquitted."

"Yes, but on a quibble. Every one, except a few friends, thinks him guilty. Surely you owe some reparation to him ?"

"And I will pay it as soon as I know—*know*, mind—that Henry is safe. I will sign a full confession of my share."

This is reported to Uncle Joe, who awaits impatiently outside.

Before night he is admitted at Kate's request, and he tries to move her from her

determination not to denounce the man who has betrayed her. All in vain.

The mere finding of the collar is not sufficient to obtain a warrant upon. No one but Kate has recognised Wybert upon the tender, and in the confusion of the accident no one has thought of sending to the ship to identify him. He is away out in the fastest boat of the line before Uncle Joe sees the mistake that has been made. His one idea is to get Kate before a magistrate, or rather a magistrate before Kate, and when Sam Pryor, who has been telegraphed for, arrives, it is too late to cut across to Queenstown.

Kate is mistress of the situation. By noon next day the *City of York* will have left Queenstown, and Wybert have escaped the last mesh of the law.

Well, the written confession of the



principal witness against him, and the admission it will contain that there is no "body" in the Beckhampton murder case, will clear Fraser Ellicott. That is a great comfort; but Uncle Joe grinds his excellent teeth and takes his new lesson of what a woman will do, to heart.

At Queenstown, Henry Wybert is almost to be pitied. He keeps his berth in an incessant shiver of fear; now hot, now cold. The splash of every passing oar, every step on the deck, goes through him. Is she dead, or is she true? When her wrongs come over him he thinks she must be dead, to be true. He cannot forget how bravely she won him back to life, how lovingly she tended him those days when they were at the Mill together; and the horrid "thud" of the wheel, which

(as he has been told) "caught the poor thing," runs through it all. When the last sack of mails is on board, and the big ship has swung round ; when the Fastnets fade away, and the dim Atlantic is before him, he feels safe.

"She must be dead," he mutters, and calls for a bottle of brandy.

Later on, he begins to justify himself. It was all her fault. How could she possibly suppose he really meant to marry her ? As a rule he is an abstemious man, but now he drinks deep, and becomes quite a jolly companion in the smoking-room. The next day the ship makes a splendid run. He bets upon it and wins. At this rate they will be at Sandy Hook in eight days. He paces the deck that night, till he feels he can sleep. Sleep and he have been strangers for many days, and oh ! how

sweet it is as he feels its soft languor stealing over him.

Suddenly he starts up, wide awake. What has happened? No pulsation of the engines, no "thud, thud" of the screw, only a slow rocking motion and an unusual heeling over.

The *City of York* has broken her main shaft, and is put back, under sail, for Plymouth!

There is a happy Christmas at the old Hall, and the talk is of another famous trial which has crowded the Crown Court at Beckhampton on the last day of the winter assize. This time Serjeant Callendar and Mr. Pryor are for the prosecution. A woman with a fearful scar across her once beautiful face is brought in on a litter, and admitted as

Queen's evidence against the prisoner. There is no help for her now, and his conduct when they were first confronted was so brutal (he thought she had denounced him) that she tells her tale almost without reluctance. He tries his best to discredit her, even now; and is a consistent villain—cold, vindictive, and false to the last.

When it is all over, and the sentence of twenty years' penal servitude is passed, Madge goes up to the poor, still pain-wrung cripple, kisses her pale lips, and murmurs :

“I forgive you, dear.”

Oh these women! Oh this love for man!

There is no more popular man in all Greenshire than Fraser Ellicott, or a

happier ! Nothing will convince the Hon. and Rev. Frank Marston that he has not acted with great prudence and foresight.

“Why, bless me !” he argues, “but for me the dear fellow might have been hanged before the truth came out. And really Madge was so headstrong.”

Uncle Joe leads his old pleasant, idle life, and is a greater authority than ever upon news that is not in the papers.

Bell's sixpenceless man is, I hear, to be made a baronet, and has consented at last to have his boots made for him.

I regret to say that the last news of Mr. William Sidebottom is not favourable. He is in trouble at Chicago about a horse. To judge by his own account, this unprincipled animal must have twisted his halter round Mr. Sidebottom's arm, and led him astray.

Kind Jessie Westwood is married to the new vicar of Laremouth. Madge goes to the wedding, but does not visit her thinking-place on the cliff.

Sam Pryor is getting on famously at the bar, and is god-father to a small edition of Fraser Ellicott bound in pink flannel and marble edged (as to his fist and legs), which is published during the following summer, and puts *BAD LUCK* on the shelf.

THE END.



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COMETH UP AS A FLOWER.  
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